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ALL OR NOTHING

MRS CASHEL HOBY

ALL, OR NOTHING.

VOL. III.

ALL, OR NOTHING.

BY

MRS. CASHEL HOEY

AUTHOR OF

“GRIFFITH'S DOUBLE,” “A GOLDEN SORROW,”

“THE BLOSSOMING OF AN ALOE,”

&c., &c.

“Thou shalt have no other gods but Me.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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ALL, OR NOTHING.

CHAPTER I.

The Bluebeard Bureau.

ANET was very much grieved by the explanation that had taken place between herself and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and his sudden departure from Bevis added to her discomfiture. She had been so absolutely innocent of all coquetry, of any intention of misleading him, of any perception of his feelings towards her, and the extent to which he was misleading himself, that she could not take any blame in the matter, but was entirely given over to wonder and regret—to wonder, genuine and deep, that she should have been found so pleasing in the

sight of a man of the world like Esdaile; that he should have come to love her so well as she could not doubt he did love her; and regret, very profound and poignant, for the pain that he must suffer, from which she could not save him. She could only hope that it would not last long; and that the future might hold within its possibilities the realisation of her own hope of a friendship with him, untroubled by the remembrance of this misplaced love. He had read her secret, he knew why it was that he must not hope, must not try, for a reversal of her sentence; and Janet shrank from that consciousness, not with any doubt of his honour and loyalty, but because of the complication that such knowledge brought into his own life, and the additional sense which it gave her of having crossed and troubled that life. Esdaile's discovery had already deprived his friend of his company; if he were less high-minded than Janet took him to be, it would deprive Dunstan of his friendship also, and thus become a double misery to her.

She would have been thrown into dismay and confusion if Sir Wilfrid had again spoken to her; and yet she sometimes wished that she could see him, and could make up her mind to ask him—if only on account of that which his quickened observation had enabled him to read in her face on that last evening—not to withdraw himself from Dunstan.

Janet possessed the excellent gift of sympathy, and yet in this case she was entirely unable to understand and estimate the pain which the mere sight of Dunstan inflicted on Esdaile; and when Dunstan complained that Sir Wilfrid had “thrown him over,” and bemoaned his own disappointment, Janet felt herself guilty in this too, that she had, however unwittingly, come between the friends whose mutual regard—it really was strong and genuine—she had invested with loftiness, disinterestedness, and constancy such as made up her own ideal of friendship.

In the keen distress which Janet suffered, the dispersion of her illusion as

to Julia's meaning, in the brief confidence that had marked their parting, had very little share. Julia had not made any reference to this in writing, and she would divine the truth, most likely, when she should learn that Sir Wilfrid had left Bevis. Janet could not tell her; she well knew how much pained she would be; and now, when she fully understood Julia's meaning, she felt that Julia would be unable to forgive her. Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was in Julia's eyes what he was in those of John Sandilands—a fortunate prince of fairy-tale times—and that he should ask and not have, that there should exist anyone so foolish and so ill-disposed as to say No to him, would be intolerable in Julia's sight. He had loved her from the first; he had told her so, and Julia had seen it! But Janet had not seen it, had not dreamed of it; in her absorption of mind and heart, she had never thought that to others she seemed free and to be won. What a world of cross purposes is this, thought Janet, who had but a glimpse

of them ; and how hard it seemed that the love of a kind and manly heart, which would have made one for whom she was day by day learning to care more and more, profoundly happy, should be given to her who could not reward or prize it.

With this fresh access of her sorrow there came a resolution. Amabel should know the truth ; there should be no additional delusion or heart-burning in this unhappy matter, if some plain speaking on Janet's part, however painful to her, could avert it. The bright, odd, enthusiastic, hard-to-manage girl had become very dear to the friend who was so strangely unlike her, for other reasons than the almost worshipping affection with which Amabel regarded her. That it should fall to her lot to cross Amabel's path, Janet felt was also very hard ; if she had not been there what would have been more likely than that Sir Wilfrid should have been attracted by Amabel ; and now her unlucky presence had brought trouble and sorrow on two people who loved her—

two of the very few in all the world to whom she meant anything.

Janet had not to wait long for an opportunity of telling Amabel what was in her mind; her pale face and evident suffering brought quick questions from the impetuous girl.

"Something has happened to you, Janet! What is it? You have been crying."

Amabel was on her knees, with her arms round Janet, in a moment, and Janet told her, as well as she could for her tears.

The girl's pretty face grew pale and fixed, but the clasp of her arms was tighter as she listened to Janet's broken words, and gathered from them that she dreaded their significance to her. She did not interrupt them once, but when they were ended she said:

"Poor Sir Wilfrid! I knew there was trouble before him; I saw it in his face from the first, and who knows better than I what a trouble this is! Janet! If I

were a man and loved you in vain, I should kill myself."

She loosed her hold, and sank into her favourite attitude upon the floor, with her hands clasped on her knees, and her eyes fixed on Janet's face.

"And so my presentiment is out, and great harm has come to him."

"And to you, dearest, to you!" sobbed Janet.

"No," said Amabel, "not to me. I do care for him; I like him very much; I have the strangest feeling about him, as if I could see something that is terrible in his life, dimly, through a veil; I might have loved him well enough to have been the happiest woman in the world if he had loved me, or the most wretched if he had not, but that I have always known——"

"What, Amabel?"

"That he loved you, dear, and that there would be no chance for him. I don't say I am quite happy, I don't say I can quite like my life now that he is gone away

out of it—so far away, and for ever, too—for he will never come to Bevis again ; but there is no disappointment ; remember that, for I never made any mistake about it, and I am not broken-hearted.”

“ And you forgive me ? ”

“ Forgive you ! Because he loves you ! Yes, indeed, for how could he help it ? Because you don’t love him ? Well, that’s another and a harder matter ; but neither can you help it. Don’t fret about me, Janet ; indeed, you need not, for I only grieve for him, and like him all the better that he loves you.”

“ You have the most generous nature in the world.”

“ Not I. I am only reasonable, in spite of all my fancifulness, and I know some price must be paid for every blessing one has in this life. In sober seriousness you are my best blessing. And, Janet, I must tell you something ; it is not only my presentiment about Sir Wilfrid that is fulfilled in this, it is a presentiment that I had about you also. It was the very first

day I saw you; and you know,"—here Amabel smiled, though with only a dim ghost of her usual brightness—"I, as well as poor Sir Wilfrid, fell in love with you on the spot; and it came over my mind, or my fancy, or my nerves, or whatever it is that receives those unaccountable impressions for which everybody except you scolds me or laughs at me, that either you would do me, or I should do you, some harm in days to come. It passed away immediately, just as a shiver—which that sort of thing is like in the mind—passes over one's body and is gone; but it had been, and now it comes back to me. This is the harm you were to do me, dearest Janet; you see, it is not much."

"Ah, I do not think so. But, at all events, it is I who have done you, however unintentionally, harm. As for you, you will do me nothing but good all the days of my life."

"I hope so," said Amabel.

The two friends said much more to one another, but Amabel did not explain to

Janet why it was that she had known from the first there was no chance for Sir Wilfrid.

After this they discussed the matter no farther, but they were even more drawn towards each other than before, and additionally companionable, if more silent. To both, the inexorably bad weather was welcome; neither felt disposed to be subject just then to any scrutiny more discerning than that of Mrs. Ainslie, who recognised no ills except her own, and that of Mr. Ainslie, who held that the climate of England was enough to account for anything concerning anybody. The weather, which kept the dwellers at The Chantry in, did not, however, keep Captain Dunstan out. He came thither nearly every day, grumbled with Mr. Ainslie, sang with Miss Monro, and made himself generally agreeable. So the year drew to its close.

Christmas had come and gone, with its pleasures of beneficence and its pains of memory, and the season, which she espe-

cially dreaded, had proved a happy time, on the whole, for Janet. The schools, and the almshouse women, the old people in the village, to which Bevis stood in the relation of the "great house," all the claimants of those bounties which are so much enhanced by personal solicitude and kindness in the bestowal of them, were saved from the neglect she had feared for them, as a consequence of the death of Mrs. Drummond, by the active liberality of Captain Dunstan. Janet had returned to Bury House a few days before Christmas, but not until she had, at Captain Dunstan's request, furnished him with a statement of all that Mrs. Drummond had been wont to do for the benefit of her neighbours at Christmas-time, and arranged with Mrs. Manners—who was much mollified by Dunstan's amended behaviour with regard to Miss Monro—for large benefactions of beef and pudding to the waifs and strays, towards whom Janet felt more kindness than the sternly-practical vicar altogether approved.

A hard frost in the beginning of January succeeded the wet weather of the close of December, and the hunting with which Edward Dunstan had hoped to beguile the tedium of his stay at Bevis was impossible. That tedium did not, however, greatly beset him. He made plans for the disposal of himself after the date up to which he meant to remain, and he even began to think about London in the season with less reluctance than he would have believed possible a short time previously; but, apart from the curiosity with which he regarded the "Bluebeard bureau," as he called it, he was in no particular hurry for the interval to pass. His life was, as a matter of fact, a pleasant one, and even his hurt pride and baffled passion could not altogether resist the stubbornness of facts. He had thoroughly qualified himself to break the seals of the packet in the Bluebeard bureau. The long delayed message from the dead had received all respect and attention from him. It had made him regard Janet Monro with addi-

tional curiosity, and enhanced the interest in her that he already felt. He remembered what Esdaile had once said about his sense of the arbitrariness of fate in its respective dealings with himself and with John Sandilands, and he applied it to the difference between Janet's destiny and his own.

Captain Dunstan liked the society of women, and especially of such as were womanly. He was not to be won by fashion, or even by the personal attractions—which, however, rarely exist in such anomalous individuals—to admire women who hunt, who “walk with the guns,” look on at the slaughter of pigeons, pretend to understand horse-racing, talk the slang of the gaming saloons, and offer at all points a melancholy and contemptible spectacle to those who wish well to the individuals and to the human race. He had too much good taste, and too much sense of humour, to be moved to any feelings save disgust and ridicule by the deplorable freaks of modern young ladyhood

in these and other objectionable directions, and he had found a few specimens of the prevailing mode, in the neighbourhood of Bevis, very irksome and oppressive to him. Amabel and Janet were both, in their far different ways, on their different levels, essentially womanly, and much to Dunstan's taste. It never occurred to him to ask himself whether, if he could have forgotten Laura and her treachery to him, he should have fallen in love with either of them, because he could not forget Laura, and her treachery had closed the book of love for him, and put it away from among his studies; he simply liked the two girls, and sought their society, especially that of Janet, with a growing pleasure. Her thoroughness, her simplicity, her quiet courage, and the utter ignorance of the world, which, contrasted with the considerable knowledge she had acquired from books, invested her with a charm largely aided by her grace and beauty.

On the 10th of January, Captain Dunstan said to himself: "This is the day

for the Bluebeard bureau. I will open the mysterious packet after breakfast." And during that meal, he once more reperused Mrs. Drummond's letter of instructions.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Cathcart, at the vicarage, presiding over the vicar's repast, which he, being a great reader of newspapers, rarely enlivened with conversation, was also thinking of the Bluebeard bureau, wondering at what time Dunstan would open the packet, how soon, and under what pretext he would reveal the secret of its contents to her.

Having waited until there should be little or no chance of his encountering an inquisitive housemaid in the Admiral's corridor, or Mrs. Manners herself on a tour of inspection, Captain Dunstan proceeded to the unused rooms, in whose silent and speckless orderliness there was something oppressive to his fancy, and, unlocking, for the second time, the little door of the central space of the old bureau, he took out the parchment-

covered packet, on which his own name was written by Mrs. Drummond's hand, carried it to the library and began the examination of its contents.

These proved to be two documents; a narrow slip of paper was folded round each, and they were numbered respectively One and Two.

Number One was a more imposing document than the other, and even when folded, and before the labelled slip of paper was removed, it looked legal.

Number Two was simply a letter.

Captain Dunstan removed the slip of paper from Number One, which he unfolded and smoothed out upon the table before him. It needed only a glance to show him that he had under his eyes a will. With the usual preamble, in fair legal text, expressed with perfect distinctness, the document before him bequeathed to Janet Monro—who was named in it in terms of the warmest affection—the estate of Bevis, and all the other property of every kind of which the

testatrix should die possessed. The will was duly signed and attested; and, with the first shock of an overwhelming surprise, there came over Dunstan a rush of desperate anger. He had then been mocked and fooled; made for three months to believe himself the owner of Bevis, to gratify Mrs. Drummond's fantastic spite, or her silly fancy! This thought was, however, but a lightning-flash; for the next instant his eye caught the date of the will. It was six months earlier than that of the document by which Mrs. Drummond had bequeathed Bevis to him. His own position was secure; her intention had changed, and at sufficient interval to do away with the idea of caprice; the sentiments she expressed in the letter which had been so long of reaching him were her final sentiments; again he had wronged her in his swift thoughts.

He reperused the will. There could be no mistake about it. Janet Monro, she of whom Mrs. Drummond had said that

she regarded her as a daughter, she who was in a manner committed to his care, had been designated as the future owner of all that was now his by Mrs. Drummond, who had only, as she said, her own free will to consult. She was the one person in all the world whom Mrs. Drummond loved; why had she changed her purpose towards her? It was a righteous purpose. Janet deserved from Mrs. Drummond all that she had to give; Janet would have made good use of it; her claim was a sounder one than his. So, in a moment of clear-seeing, did the truth come home to Edward Dunstan. Whence had come the change? Eagerly Dunstan turned from the document, Number One, to the letter, Number Two. In this he would find the explanation, no doubt.

The contents of Number Two were as follows :

“I address you, Edward, on the supposition that you will have acted in conformity with the communication from me that is to reach you with the notification

of my death ; that you will have acquired the right to read these lines, and to become acquainted with a secret which must never be known to anyone except yourself. I write on the supposition that you have resided three months at Bevis, that you have won the esteem and regard of Janet Monro, and that you neither are, nor are intending to place yourself, under any engagement to marry. These things being so, the case has arisen in which it is my wish to make you acquainted with the fact which the paper marked Number One will reveal to you, and you will now receive my last communication, which I make to you in the strictest confidence, and which will have, when it reaches you, the additionally solemn sanction that the never-to-be-broken silence of death will have been for so long established between us.

“ It is to Janet Monro—to her nobility of mind, her disinterestedness, her firmness, that you owe the possession of Bevis, and of all I have left to you. You see

that it was all to have been hers, and you will readily believe the alteration did not originate with me. Made aware of my intention, she most earnestly entreated me to forego it; and, failing in that, she positively assured me that it would be useless for me to attempt to put it in force, as nothing should induce her to accept the legacy of the estate and fortune, which she persisted in believing to be your inheritance by right. She succeeded. I yielded to her earnest prayer; and, had she known that I had actually made the will, of which I spoke to her only as a thing intended to be done, I have no doubt she would have insisted on my letting her destroy it with her own hands, so that you might never by any accident come to the knowledge that it had existed, and that in this, too, Janet would have succeeded.

“If you have gained the right to read these lines, you know by this time what manner of woman she is whom I would have had to fill my place here, and that

there is none which she would not adorn. No one, however, but yourself and myself can ever know all the truth about Janet. And now I am going to tell you why I have recorded this truth, so that it should come to your knowledge after such a preparation as I have contrived. It is because, having done you all the good in my power in one way for Janet's sake—there will be nothing due from you to my memory on that score—I would like to do you a far greater good for your own ; and because, having renounced the dear hope that she would be here after me, in her own right, to keep up the remembrance of us and the tradition of the past, the same hope in another form has stolen back into my old heart. I believe that you, as you will be when you read this in Janet's confidence, her friend, the witness of her good and blameless life, could win her for your wife, if you wish to do so ; and that, if you do wish it, and do win her, the good I am now doing you is as far beyond what I have already done you as blessedness is

beyond wealth. Should this not be so—should there never be a closer tie than that of friendship between you and Janet Monro, this that I am doing can be no wrong; for it will make you know how noble a heart is that in which you will have secured a friend's place; and, for the rest, the fancy that is not to become fact, the hope that is not to be realised, they will remain for ever a dead secret with the dead."

Mrs. Cathcart remained at home the whole of the day on the 10th of January, in the expectation, which she did not quite admit to herself, of Captain Dunstan's calling at the vicarage. He did not come; and the following day also passed without her seeing or hearing anything of him. It was not until the 12th that he presented himself, and she perceived a curious change in his look and manner. He entered at once upon the subject of which they were both thinking, and with straightforward seriousness told Mrs.

Cathcart that he found himself unable to reveal the nature of that disclosure which had been made to him.

"It has no present concern," he added, "for anyone, and merely referred to a matter which Mrs. Drummond considered it necessary that I, as her heir, should be informed of. The delay in my receiving her first letter turns out to be of no consequence, and the whole affair is of absolutely no interest or importance."

"You look as if you had done more thinking over this absolutely unimportant affair than you ever did in your life before," was Mrs. Cathcart's mental comment upon an explanation which explained nothing; but she was too well-bred to let the slightest doubt or disappointment appear; and her smiling "How fortunate," and immediate easy introduction of some subject indefinitely removed from the topic under taboo, set her visitor at ease at once. In a few minutes she found that he was taking the lead in the conversation, and that its direction was towards Janet

Monro. Her love for the place that had been her home for so long; her quiet tastes, her refinement, and cultivation; of these things Dunstan spoke in a way that seemed to provoke a question. At last Mrs. Cathcart asked it, point-blank.

"Have you anything particular to say to me about Janet? Has anything happened?"

"Yes," replied Dunstan; "and I wished to tell you myself, because you are such a good friend to her and to me. I have asked her to come back to Bevis. I know you will be glad. I have asked her to be my wife, and she has consented."

Mrs. Cathcart did not speak for a full minute; then she said,

"I never was more glad of anything in my life." And then, with striking inconsistency, she burst into tears.

"And now for a bit of news"—so ran the closing paragraph of a letter from Edward Dunstan to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, written that same night to reach him just before he was to leave England on an ex-


cursion, of which nothing was settled except that it was to be a distant one—" which will interest you, and surprise you, too. I shall want the cats'-eyes after all, and Lady Esdaile shall have another set. You can guess what I mean. I did not think of it when you were here; but I know it's the best thing I can do, and that you will think so. I have asked Miss Monro to marry me—I asked her yesterday; she has said 'Yes,' and she is most anxious you should know, and sends you all sorts of pleasant messages. Don't you think I'm right? Of course, there's no nonsense about this; that is over—well over, too, no doubt, and the new leaf I have turned will, I hope, have no follies writ large on it. Nothing settled, of course; but there is nothing particular for us to wait for, and so you must not be long away."

At the hour when Edward Dunstan was writing these lines, little thinking of the feelings of unavailing regret they would arouse in Esdaile, Janet was kneeling in the deep bay of the window of her

room at Bury House, her folded arms upon the window-sill, her face turned to the moonlight lying in silver bars upon the frost-bound earth, with radiant joy and peace and thankfulness in it, not contradicted by the tears which shone in her eyes. For Janet, in that quiet hour of unequalled happiness and hope, was not thinking of her lover only; not only of the great bliss that had come into her life, to glorify it for evermore; not only of the beauty and the sweetness and the wonder of life with love acknowledged and returned in it; but also of the friend who was gone, and the interpretation of her bright, slow-falling tears was: "If she might but see me now! If she could only know how it is with me!"

CHAPTER II.


A Granted Prayer.

“F course I am delighted. Of course I have most heartily wished that it might be so ever since I found out that Janet cared for him, and I saw that very soon ; but, if you ask me to believe that the luck is on Janet's side, then I can't, and don't.”

“What is luck, then, you impracticable creature, if it is not in all that has happened to Janet? She cares for the one man in all the world who can restore her to her old home, and he asks her to marry him ; the match is a splendid one for her, and a perfect love-match as well. I must say I think there never was a case of

greater luck, or rather good fortune, for I don't like the word you are so fond of, and you will not find people taking your view of it, Amabel. The world in general will think Captain Dunstan has done a very romantic, and not a very wise thing, and that Janet is a favourite of destiny."

Mrs. Cathcart spoke a little irritably; for the truth was, she was almost as much puzzled as she was pleased by the unexpected realisation of her own wishes. She had never felt more certain of the correctness of any impression than she felt of the correctness of that which Captain Dunstan left on her mind when he brought her Mrs. Drummond's letter to read. He was not in love with Janet, as she had previously hoped: then he comes and tells her that Janet is to be his wife, and she, though genuinely glad, feels that there is something wanting. This visit which she is going to make at Bury House does not afford her the unqualified pleasure that it ought to afford her, and she vents her own contradiction of feeling upon her



companion, who has also a shady side to her sentiments on the subject.

Amabel turns her head sharply to look at her cousin, and jerks the mouths of Jack and Jill—the ponies are taking the two ladies over the frost-bound ground to Bury House at a cheery rate—and bursts out with an indignant remonstrance.

“I do believe you are going to be as worldly-minded as the rest of them!” she exclaimed; “and that you, who were the very person to make me look for the peerlessness of Janet, actually think the accident of Captain Dunstan’s being the owner of Bevis and a lot of money puts him on a level with her. Of course it is very charming and delightful, so charming and delightful that it is the greatest possible miracle it should have happened; but she’s a hundred thousand times too good for him, even if there had not been the other woman.”

“The other woman! What do you mean?”

“I don’t know,” said Amabel, and Jack

and Jill got another jerk. "At least, I do know; I mean the other woman whom he was in love with before he went out to India, and whom he could not marry, for some reason or other. I told you about her."

"You told me about your own idea that such a person existed; but you did not know it as a fact. And besides, what has that to do with the matter? If there really was such a person, nothing can be plainer than that Captain Dunstan has got over it, whatever it was that came between them: he would not be going to marry Janet if he had not."

"Of course not; but do you really not think Janet too good for him? Do you really think they will see things alike, and take life on the same level?"

Mrs. Cathcart did not reply. She did not distinctly hear—she was thinking. Presently she said, with great animation:

"Amabel, what if the other woman, as you call her, were Janet herself, after all?

May you not be right, and my notion be right also?"

"I never thought of such a thing," said Amabel, dubiously. "He had seen little of Janet before he went to India."

"That is no argument against it. Love at first sight is at least very common, if it is not the rule; and several things make me think I have hit upon the truth. Janet has captivated him now, why should she not have captivated him then, when he certainly could not have married her, when her position with his own relatives would have made it very unpleasant for her had she suspected or returned his feelings, when, in fact, the whole thing would have seemed to him an impossibility? What a game of cross-purposes it was, if, indeed, this was the case?"

Here Mrs. Cathcart left off rather abruptly, for the sense of cross-purposes that struck her so strongly was derived from her own perception of the meaning that underlay Mrs. Drummond's letter to Dun-

stan and its occult purpose, and this, she remembered in time, must not be divulged to her companion. Without imparting the knowledge of it she could not make Amabel see from her point of view, so she wisely said no more, and was not annoyed when Amabel said she could not take that view; she was sure Dunstan had not felt any interest beyond the merest polite good-will towards Janet when they met at Bury House. Mrs. Cathcart felt much relieved by her own new idea; she parted readily in its favour with her former impression, and was ready to think that Dunstan's manner was only prompted by the coolness and self-repression of a man of the world before he is quite certain of that success, his gladness and triumph in which he does not hesitate afterwards to display. Under the influence of this conviction, Mrs. Cathcart allowed herself to be thoroughly happy, and listened to Amabel with unmoved complacency.

"It is not that I don't like him," said Amabel, "for indeed I do; there's perhaps

nobody I know, except Janet, that I should not grudge him to. But I'm going to get over that, and to think of nothing but her views of the case."

They were met on their arrival at Bury House by the two old ladies, whose pleasure and importance were very great under the novel circumstances. Janet had just gone down to the gardener's house, where there was a sick child to be seen to; she would return presently—an intimation which sent Amabel off to find her there, and they were glad to have an opportunity of telling Mrs. Cathcart how nicely Captain Dunstan had behaved.

"Just as if our dear Janet had had two mothers, and we were them both," said Miss Susan, "he came to us, and told us she had done him the great honour of accepting him for her husband, and he hoped we should not object, but would feel satisfied that in placing her in his hands we might be sure of her happiness and welfare. So sensible, my dear madam, so unlike the young men one hears of. I

assure you he might have been her brother, speaking to us for a third party, he was so quiet and so respectful. What could we say, you know, except that we were delighted, and more than sensible of Janet's good fortune, as indeed we are, for it is quite wonderful."

"So is his," interposed Miss Sandilands. "No man in the world, let his position be what it may, could have any greater gift from Providence than such a wife as Janet, and so we told him. He seemed quite sensible of that, and said in the kindest way that he had an old acquaintance with her excellence."

"And his chief anxiety"—here Miss Susan struck in again—"was that there should be very little delay about their marriage. I must say he is as impatient on that point as any of the lovers I have ever read of—I never had any experience of them myself," added Miss Susan, with a pleasant smile—"and he is as reasonable as he is impatient, because, as he says, the sooner Janet is back again in her old

home, and everything is as Mrs. Drummond would have wished it to be, the better for everyone."

"That is all as it ought to be; and what does Janet say?"

"Here she comes to answer for herself," said Miss Susan, and at that moment Janet and Amabel passed the window.

Mrs. Cathcart went out quickly, met Janet at the porch, and told her by a silent embrace how much she rejoiced in her happy prospect. The older woman looked with astonished admiration at the girl when she had gone back into the drawing-room with her, and stood in the midst of the group of friends, the very picture of beautiful pure happiness and hope. The steady light in her serene grey eyes, the lovely colour on her cheek, the sensitive smile that hovered about her lips, were all like herself, indeed, but like herself intensified. She said a few words of her gratitude for all their kindness, but they were not very distinctly said.

"My kindness, Janet," said Mrs. Cath-

cart, "has a strong dash of the benevolence that begins at home in it. I am so rejoiced to think of you at Bevis that I cannot utter my feelings. And the vicar charges me to express his sentiments also."

"I am so glad Mr. Cathcart does not—that he is not—dear Mrs. Cathcart, it is all so much too good for me; you are all so much too kind to me."

The motherless girl burst into a passion of happy tears, which was allowed to exhaust itself by the wise management of Mrs. Cathcart, who left her to Amabel, while she talked business with the Misses Sandilands.

Captain Dunstan, it appeared, had pleaded successfully with Janet for a short engagement. The marriage was to take place in six weeks, and the first peep of the world, beyond a circuit of twenty miles, which Janet had ever had for so long as she could remember, was to be her wedding trip. The wedding was to be as quiet as possible, and the only person to be invited

—except Amabel, Mrs. Cathcart, and one friend of Dunstan's—was to be Julia Carmichael.

The old ladies and Mrs. Cathcart formed one group, Janet and Amabel formed another, and these practical matters were discussed in the first; but the girls heard most of what was said by their elders, and when Miss Susan told Mrs. Cathcart that Captain Dunstan's most particular wish was that Sir Wilfrid Esdaile should be with him on the occasion, Janet's hand pressed Amabel's nervously, and received a strong pressure in return.

"He will not come," whispered Amabel.

"No, I am sure he will not, and I don't know what to do. Ought I to tell—him, or not?"

"I don't know. I think he will tell him when he refuses to come; he will if he's the man I take him to be, and then he will live it down."

It distressed Janet that even so much allusion as this to the fact that she was

loved and sought after by another was necessary. She would have liked to know that the mere possibility that she could ever have been anything except Edward Dunstan's wife had not presented itself to the mind of anyone ; she would have liked to feel that the words in which he had asked her for that heart which had been his ever since she had known that love existed among the pains, and might be the one sole joy of life, its savour, its prize, its help, and its reward, were the only words with such a meaning that had ever reached her ears. But that it could not be so, was the one little particle of alloy in all the measureless wealth of her great blessedness.

Captain Dunstan was to arrive at Bury House that evening, the old ladies told Mrs. Cathcart ; and he talked of having to go to London in a few days to make some necessary arrangements. This was rather a pity, they thought, as the engagement was to be so short, for they had several old-fashioned notions on the subject of

courtship, and held that the time it lasted was the brightest time of a girl's life, that in which she enjoyed most of the happy and innocent triumphs of girlhood. It seemed to be the modern notion to cut all this beautiful sweethearting-time as short as possible; and they could only suppose people knew best what suited themselves.

"Of course, it's very different when there's a beautiful home ready to bring a bride to, and there's nothing to be thought of in the way of furniture, and servants, and how things are to be done for the best; we know there's no comparison at all between Janet's case and our John's; but still we could wish Captain Dunstan were not in quite such a hurry."

"And I could not forgive him if he granted Janet a single day's extension of leave, for I want her back at Bevis quite desperately," gaily answered Mrs. Cathcart; and then, Janet having recovered her composure, she turned to her, and the friends conversed long and earnestly.

Mrs. Cathcart had not seen Dunstan since he had brought her the good news, but that was by no means surprising : he was, of course, very much occupied, and at Bury House daily.

“Did you ever see such a picture of perfect happiness in your life?” Amabel asked Mrs. Cathcart, when they were on their way home.

“I really do not think I ever did. And what a blessing it is to think that it is such well-founded happiness, with everything in his character and position and circumstances to make it lasting.”

“Except her innocence of life and the world’s ways, and her wonderfully high ideals, and her belief not only that her geese are swans, for she thinks that of us, you know—of you and me, holds our plumes to be dazzling and our forms of unequalled grace—but that this particular goose—Captain Dunstan, I mean—is a swan of more than earthly swannishness, a phoenix among swans. I wish she did not worship him quite so devoutly.”


"Nonsense, Amabel; if Janet did not worship, as you call it, the man she loves, she would not love him at all, it's in her nature; anything else wouldn't be Janet; and besides, when was any man the worse of being overrated by his wife, or any woman the worse of overrating her husband? The risk and the evil are all the other way, it seems to me."

"When they get found out, you mean," said Amabel, "and the joss-sticks are pulled up, and the incense is put away with the pepper and the pickles."

They were right; Janet did look the perfect picture of happiness, and she felt the perfect reality. The variety of her feelings, the wonder, the pride, the humility, the deep thankfulness, the new horizon of life, the boundless gratitude and devotion, the almost awful sense of a fulfilled hope which she had hardly ventured to admit as a hope at all, the many memories of the past with the sting taken out of them all, the sense of a great peace; all these absorbed her when her lover was not with

her, and formed, when he was, an accompaniment as of most entrancing music to the unspeakable delight of his presence.

She looked back into her short life no farther than to the time when she had seen him first and loved him—it might have been with her fancy, but she took it for her heart; that summer-time when he came to Bevis, and lighted up the staid and quiet house, where she lived so sombre though so happy a life, like a sunbeam. He had been only a couple of weeks at Bevis, and she knew vaguely that the Admiral and he did not get on together very well, but what had that to do with her? She knew, afterwards, that Mrs. Drummond did not like him; but Mrs. Drummond never alleged that there was anything in it except a matter of taste, and what had that to do with her? All the conditions, circumstances, influences about Janet cohered to make of what might have been at first but a passing fancy the one great truth, the central meaning of her life. On three occasions



only, with long intervals between, and for a short period, she had been in his society; and, while he had hardly taken any real heed of her, the courtesy of his always winning manner had prevented her feeling that. It was quite impossible that any woman could have been slighted or neglected where Edward Dunstan was; she was "the young lady of the house" to him, though to others she might be only "Mrs. Drummond's companion;" and, his own heart and mind full at the time of Laura Chumleigh, and of the contending hopes and fears of his position with his uncle, he won the heart of the young girl who had no one with whom to compare him, and was absolutely innocent of every art of flirtation and prompting of self-consciousness. When the time came at which Janet knew that Mrs. Drummond had determined to bequeath to her the estate and fortune which she had never thought of otherwise than as Dunstan's, the shock of terror and grief which the knowledge caused her revealed to her

loving friend the secret she had not herself discovered. That there was anything noble, anything generous in her immediate renunciation of the intended bequest, never crossed Janet's mind for a moment.

Had the Admiral's nephew been nothing to her, instead of being all her world, she would have done just the same. But the delight, the sweetness of the secret sense that she had so done this thing that he should never know there had been any thought of another but himself in the Admiral's place, were exquisite indeed. If she had not known, if the will had been read after Mrs. Drummond's death, and she had either been obliged to renounce the legacy, or, perhaps, for she could not tell whether her renunciation would have handed it over to the Admiral's nephew, to accept it and then make it over to him, it would have been so miserable, so distressing; there might have been some foolish anger and hurt pride on his part; perhaps, horrible thought! he might not

have been able to forgive her for the mortification, in the infliction of which she would have been so guiltless ; he might have had some sort of sense as if she were his enemy.

She allowed herself to dwell in imagination upon this possibility for the sake of the delightful certainty and safety which the manner of her discovery and defeat of Mrs. Drummond's cruel kindness had brought to her ; it had sustained her under the keen grief of parting with the place and the innumerable objects that had been so dear to her ; it had been present with her while she carried out all Mrs. Drummond's directions, and waited for a communication from Dunstan which never came.

Dreadful as it would have been to her had this imagined danger been realised, it was not the only one she would have feared, had Mrs. Drummond's temporary intention ever found expression ; she would have feared the possibility of his gratitude—feared that it might have occurred to

him as possible that she could have accepted such a gift, and therefore that it might have also occurred to him as possible to feel grateful, obliged, and under some sort of compliment to her. With the repugnance of a nature in which every feeling was thorough, absolute, complete in all its consequences, Janet shrank from such a possibility; for she loved him with a strength and depth of love which could have brooked nothing from him but love.

Nothing but love! And it had come! All was changed; the earth was suddenly turned into heaven—all the future was irradiated with joy. If Janet gave a thought to her past fancies and fears at all, it was only because they crossed her memory when she was busy with the thought of how strange a fulfilment of that intention which she had frustrated had been brought about by destiny. She had never known her parents, but it seemed to her that the veil was rent that hid them from her in the land of light, and that they knew she was happy, and were

happy with her. The music that her heart made found utterance in her voice; the perfect trust and love which filled that heart touched her face with a richer and a rosier beauty.

Captain Dunstan's demeanour in the character of an accepted suitor was very graceful, and the brief period of their engagement passed over without any untoward incidents to mar its pleasantness. This pair of lovers never quarrelled, there never arose any little jealousies or distrusts between them; one lived in a dream which drew its beautiful illusion from her own pure, passionate, inexperienced, absolutely-surrendered heart; the other lived in a pleasant enough sort of reality, seeing that he had laid by dreams and illusions, and was pleased with the consciousness that he had done the right thing. After all, he must have married and settled at some time, and one time was just as good as another, when none could make any real difference.

It might have been another matter if he

had gone up to town for the season, and once more met Laura ; it would not have been so easy by any means. And Janet was very nice—charming, indeed, in her way, very handsome, very clever, with all her ignorance, which her intelligence would speedily remove, and which was, at all events, infinitely better than the detestable knowingness of most girls, very refined, if unlike other people, and then so exquisitely good. He would not have thought of her as a wife but for the peculiar circumstances, indeed ; but then he would not have thought of anyone as a wife, not for a long time, at least. In her calm, profound way, Dunstan thought, she certainly loved him, and she had behaved splendidly ; he was almost sorry that he must never tell her that he knew that, but it would never do, even if he were not bound ; there was something about her which made him sure of that—well, she should never have any reason to regret it, and it was most fortunate she was of the quiet-minded sort.

Quand on n'a pas ce qu'on aime, il faut aimer

ce qu'on a—or, if not “love,” then like—which does as well in the end.

He wondered what Laura would think—Laura, who would not wait for him, when nobody could have known that he had no chance of Bevis, who would not stand a little bullying from her mother for his sake—for he believed she had married Thornton as much to get away from Lady Rosa as for his wealth—if she knew that there was a girl, quite without friends or position, who had renounced a fortune for love of him, and so that it never should be known to him? Would the contrast with her own conduct humiliate her in her own sight? At all events, though she could not know anything about that part of the matter, Laura would soon learn that he was not breaking his heart about her any longer. Julia Carmichael would tell her, whether with or without the consciousness that the information would have any special interest, and she would be sure to add that Janet was handsome. No one in the world, least of all Laura, would ever

dream of any motive except or beside love in his marriage. 'And so the old lady would have her way, after all. The post-humous match-making would succeed. Now, if Laura had only kept her promise to him, that will would have gone unread into the fire, and Janet's renunciation would never have been known to him, and Janet herself, what would have become of her? Would she have gone on living, or rather vegetating, at Bury House with her old friends, or would she, too, have adopted the frank philosophy of the maxim he had just remembered, and liked somebody else?

Captain Dunstan was thinking desultorily on these general lines, when the answer to his letter to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile reached him. It bore a Spanish post-mark.

"Spain! eh!" said Dunstan. "That accounts for the delay."

He read the letter, and his face fell; Sir Wilfrid Esdaile at least justified Amabel's opinion of him. Very frankly and simply he told Dunstan why it was that, while wishing him every happiness,

he could not be present at his wedding. "I know Miss Monro will not tell you," he added; "and as no estrangement shall come between us if I can help it, I tell you I would rather not meet her again until she is your wife. You know how one gets over a thing of this kind, and of course it is easier where one never had a chance; but I never mean to get over my belief that you are the luckiest fellow in the world, and that there's nobody in it to compare with Miss Monro."

"Esdaile will not come to our wedding," said Dunstan that evening to Janet, "and he tells me why. I must have been very stupid not to see it; it is plain enough now."

"I hope," she answered, trembling and blushing, "I shall not cost you your friend. It never occurred to me for one moment until he spoke to me."

"Ah, but you are not in the least vain; I remember now he was never easy unless he was coming here or to The Chantry. We shall not lose him; he's the

best fellow in the world. Here's the song."


Janet sang, and Dunstan turned the pages, and no more was said, but Dunstan's memory was busy with those days at Southampton, when Esdaile had thought him so unreasonable, and he had thought Esdaile so insensible. On Janet's white arm was the bracelet, with the softly, shiftily gleaming cats' eyes; the bracelet he had meant for Laura, and then for Esdaile's wife. Janet looked at it, and touched it now and then lovingly, almost reverently; it was his first gift.

"I never saw jewels of this kind before," said Janet, when she had finished her song. "Tell me about them."

He told her, and the old time when he had bought them at Ceylon seemed wonderfully distant.

The next day he went to London, and between that time and the date appointed for the marriage only one vexatious circumstance occurred.

The individual who troubled the even



current of events was Colonel Chumleigh. He got an attack of gout, and Lady Rosa resented his conduct so severely that Julia felt it impossible to leave her uncle to the tender mercies of his indignant wife; so that she sent only good wishes and a marriage gift to Janet, who could not help suspecting that Julia was angry with her.

On a bright cold day, at the end of February, the quiet wedding took place; and, as the vicar joined the hands of the bride and bridegroom, the wintry sun shone out, and a streak of its light touched the marble tablet on the wall of the church which was inscribed with Mrs. Drummond's name. Janet's glance followed the ray, and her heart went with it, in a great thrill of love and gratitude for the past, and hope, unsullied and boundless, for the future.

Captain and Mrs. Dunstan were to begin their journey from Bury House, but it was at the vicarage, whither the little party had gone to luncheon from the church, that Amabel took leave of Janet.

“Do you remember what you promised me?” she said, eagerly, holding back Janet yet another minute, while Dunstan and the vicar stood patiently by the carriage door, “that, come what would, nothing should ever part you and me.”

“Of course I remember, and now, when I come back, we shall be more together than ever.”

“Did you ever see a lovelier bride?” asked Mrs. Cathcart of the vicar, as she and Amabel drew their chairs up to the fire, and he was preparing to leave them to their tea and talk.

“Only once,” said the vicar. His wife smiled and shook her head at him.

“And,” he continued, “I never saw, even once, so perfectly self-possessed a bridegroom. A handsome and a happy pair.”

CHAPTER III.

"Tom Esdaile's Boy."

IT was a relief to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile to receive the letter in which Edward Dunstan told him that he was going to marry Janet. There was nothing heroic about the young man, who had hitherto had so much of his own way in life, and had not on the whole made a bad use of it; but there was a certain generosity and large-heartedness which made him able to be glad that the girl who had rejected him, who might have made so different a man of him, had she accepted him, was not to have her life also embittered by disappointment. And at first he had feared that it was to be so. With the

revelation of the truth to him, there had come much more than the bitterness of the knowledge that it was his own familiar friend who had won, all unconsciously, all involuntarily, the prize which to Sir Wilfrid seemed just the one prize in the gift of fate worth the winning: there had come great compassion and fear for Janet herself. It had not occurred to him for a moment that Janet had made such an impression upon Dunstan as could lead to the result which had taken place. He and his friend had dropped the subject of Mrs. Thornton by common tacit consent, and Esdaile did not know whether Dunstan had got over it; but whether or not, there had not been anything to indicate that one so utterly different had supplanted her. Esdaile did not think Dunstan more likely to be constant to a hopeless passion than any other man—always excepting himself, whom a little while ago he would have suspected of such a sentiment less than anybody—but his very winning and quietly attentive ways, which

might have looked to a stranger like the result of captivity, were, as Esdaile knew, habitual to Dunstan, and just as much addressed to Miss Sandilands, or to Julia Carmichael, as to Janet.

Her rejection of himself was, he well knew, final; he had said to himself, "She will never change"—was not that steadfastness of hers in all things, great and small, one of her rare charms?—and in all his own pain he had grieved for hers, quite sincerely and unaffectedly, and with much impatient murmuring at the prevalence of cross-purposes in human affairs, and the vanity of all things. Here was Janet, a peerless woman, throwing away love—which would have made him (Esdaile) the happiest man alive, and kept him straight, as he familiarly phrased it in his thoughts, always—upon Dunstan, who was in love with another woman who had thrown him over very lightly, to say the least of it, even supposing he had not so much reason to think that Laura really cared for him as he had represented.

Esdaile did not hate his friend because Janet loved him, though he frankly envied him with all his heart; and, when the news reached him, he was surprised beyond measure. The cure had been complete then, and strangely rapid; going on under his own eyes, simultaneously, indeed, with the mending of his own broken bones, and he had never suspected it! Well; so be it. Dunstan was a good fellow, but he did not deserve this last best good that fate had sent him; the man who had been so enslaved by one so very different from Janet, could not give Janet such love as she merited, such love as only could make her happy. Esdaile believed himself to be a common-place enough sort of a fellow; until he met Janet he had never particularly wished to be other and better than he was; but he believed that he could appreciate her more highly, and sympathise with her more truly—he who had never been in love with anyone except her, who had no memories of false and fickle fine-ladyism to blunt his perception of her

pure truth and fervent goodness, and to take the edge off his taste for those qualities.

Dunstan was going to marry Janet, and he could write of it so coolly, and hope all follies—meaning love of the kind which he had lavished vainly on Laura Chumleigh—were over for him! It seemed like a bad dream to Esdaile, but also a very hard and bitter reality; and nothing that he had ever had to do in his life cost him so much pain in the doing as the writing to Dunstan, whose letter had reached him before he left England, and travelled with him to the town on the Spanish frontier, from whence he had despatched his answer.

Would Sir Wilfrid have been sufficiently magnanimous to be glad, had he known that it was to his hand Janet owed that little push which had set the wheel of fortune turning for her? When he found among his papers the slim black-bordered envelope, addressed, in a hand which he had never seen, to Captain Edward Dunstan, and sent it on to its proper destina-

tion, he had been glad that he was accidentally able to remove a cause of annoyance and perplexity from his friend and from Janet; but he had thought no more of it, and he never knew that to that trifling circumstance the woman he loved and "grudged sair" to Dunstan owed the fulfilment of her heart's desire.

Then there fell on him a great discontent and sad weariness of life, and the evils of his early training, or rather the want of it, began to tell on him. If he had not hitherto regarded life from an Utopian point of view, he had at least believed it a very pleasant sort of experience and institution generally, and had not troubled himself with the contemplation of it in any of its aspects towards persons less fortunate than himself. He was very good-natured, easy to move to a ready and untroublesome kind of charitableness, and, as he proved in the case of John Sandilands, trusty in friendship; but he was not either by nature or education a man to bear trouble, and especially dis-

appointment, well, in the sense of profitably. Out of the eater comes not forth meat, nor of the bitter, sweetness, except to the tried and disciplined mind and will, and these he had not; so that Sir Wilfrid Esdaile took it ill that his sky had clouded over, and sulked with fortune, in whose smiles he had lived hitherto, because her brow had knitted itself, and her eyes were stern.

The first time a man learns, as a hard fact, by personal experience, that he cannot have what he wants, the lesson is bound to be unpleasant, and it will be the more so in proportion as it is long delayed, and in striking contrast with previous experiences. Sir Wilfrid was a bad subject for such teaching; an unruly pupil in the hard school of contradiction, impatient of pain and resentful. Janet's kindly message vexed him; he had believed her wider-minded, capable of comprehension of feelings which she had never experienced, and of sympathy with them; he thought she would have some idea of

what the hopeless loss of her meant to him. He believed himself much less egotistical in his love than she was in hers; the harmless words in Dunstan's letter, which she could hardly have avoided allowing him to write, unless she had made the avowal to him which it was for Esdaile himself to make or to leave unmade—but this he did not perceive, or, at least, did not take into account—hurt him. She was happy, and what did it matter to her? Thus the man who really loved Janet with a love which might have elevated his whole character, misjudged her, and, taking his punishment ill, hardened himself. It was not that the "Amen" to "God bless her" stuck in his throat; no, he could be glad that she was happier than he; it was that he could not be reconciled with his enemy—disappointment. That restlessness, which is our modern fashion of parrying trouble, seized upon him, and the notion of returning to Ceylon, which he had at first mentioned to Dunstan merely because he found it difficult to

write at all, and did not quite know how to account for himself, began to assume the form of a serious purpose.

He would go to Ceylon, stay awhile with John, and go on to India, do a regular grand tour of the country, try whether there was any distinction or amusement to be got out of the big game, and perhaps make his way to some of those wild and extraordinary places, in which everything is so strange that it seems impossible one could go on thinking the old thoughts and be haunted by the old scenes in them. He had fallen in with a few people whom he knew on his way through the south of France, and had gone on with them into Spain, caring nothing about them, and little about whither he went or what he looked at, but yielding to the restlessness of an idle man. He sometimes wished now that he were not an idle man, that his life were not all leisure, that it had some certain and enforced occupation in it, since pleasure, in which he had hitherto found his business, had become of a sudden so

hideously vapid that he asked himself whether it was not the most stupendous of bores. He thought even that he should like well enough to manage that coffee-plantation of his, if only it were not his own. Altogether the state of mind into which Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was falling was one which would have been observed with regret by anyone who cared for him. Unfortunately, no one who cared for him was near him; circumstances had for some time made of his association with Captain Dunstan his closest tie, and this was now broken, if not for ever, at least for all the time of distraction and unrest during which he would most have needed companionship and counsel. Under the influence of unhappiness, and revolt against it, the "wildness" for which Sir Wilfrid's father had had in his time a reputation, which was perhaps a little worse than he deserved, began to develop itself in "Tom Esdaile's boy," as Mr. Gilchrist had called him. Sir Wilfrid drifted about a good deal just at this time, and when the intelligence of

Dunstan's marriage reached him—he had been expecting it, half fearing the announcement, half longing to know that the event had really taken place, but entirely angry with himself for caring, and quarrelsomely asking himself what business it was of his—he drifted back from Spain with the new acquaintances who had added themselves to the old ones in whose company he had crossed the frontier, and found himself, without much premeditation, and in a devil-may-care frame of mind, among the gambling world of Nice and Monaco.

In former days Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had never cared for gambling; he had never felt the craving for any fierce and engrossing excitement, but had been well content with the less harmful diversions of sport and society. He had none of the vulgar love of mere gain very often underlying that passion for gambling, which is, by some odd perversion of reasoning, held less odious when it is free from a sentiment which, though mean, is at least reasonable,

and he was not a sufficiently rich man to lose with impunity and indifference ; therefore he had kept clear of that temptation. "Fatal Zero" had not allured him, while he was still as when we saw him first,

"A youth light-hearted and content ;"

but he was drawn towards it, when in the fever of his disappointment he turned from those milder and more desultory pursuits which had satisfied him hitherto.

He would go out to Ceylon by-and-by, he kept telling himself, when Rattray and St. John and Le Mesurier and the others should have gone back to London, whither he had no intention of turning his steps for many a day ; but for the present he would stay here, and do as the others did, who did not want to forget how much better and better off they might have been but for the cross-grained dealings of fate with them. And so the early spring found Sir Wilfrid Esdaile among the motley company who thronged by times the Promenade des Anglais or the beautiful

gardens which border the coast at Nice; but were frequent in their visits to the paradisaical pandemonium of Monte Carlo.

He had not heard directly from Dunstan, but he knew from Julia that the newly-married pair were in Paris, and that they were to be in London after Easter. What a wonderland must the bright city be to Janet, he thought, remembering the eagerness with which she had questioned him about Paris, while showing him that so much as could be learned of its history and associations from books was far more familiar to her than to himself. Julia said little of Janet, and that little in a measured way, and Sir Wilfrid wondered whether she had found out his secret, if secret his love could indeed have been called. He had not been careful to hide it; Dunstan, for instance, had he been observant in a very ordinary degree, might have seen it clearly enough. At least, it was evident Julia did not rejoice in Janet's marriage. Sir Wilfrid wondered what she had said to John Sandilands

about it, and what that steady-going and obstinate young Scotchman thought of the celerity with which Dunstan had recovered from his disconsolate state. How well he remembered the vague trifling way in which they had discussed the unnamed young lady of Dunstan's love, and the first casual mention of Miss Monro.

A very bright day at the end of March, the sort of day which makes sojourners in a land of sunshine seek to increase their own sense of well-being by speculating upon what their friends in England are probably suffering from the weather, had tempted out into the pure and sparkling air a number of the more confirmed invalids, whose presence lends a touch of sadness to the scene in so many places on the Riviera; and the Castle Hill was more than usually attractive, with its palms and cypresses flung against a sky of the clearest blue, and the far-spreading prospect over the Bay of the Angels steeped in sunshine. Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and two of his friends

had accompanied some new arrivals to the Castle Hill, and Sir Wilfrid was pointing out to the ladies of the party the various features of a view which has not many rivals, when he suddenly stopped short, arrested by the sight of two persons who were advancing slowly in the direction of the platform.

They were two women ; the taller and younger of the two leaned on the arm of the shorter and older, and, though walking with manifest fatigue, had something of eagerness in her gait and expression. The sunshine seemed to bring refreshment to her eyes, and her fair but wan brow and cheeks ; her slightly parted lips seemed to drink the pure delicious air as she came slowly on, with a graceful walk and distinguished carriage, although no one could look at her and fail to see that for her the beckoning hand was raised. Her face was very fair, with such harmony of line and feature that its beauty was still striking though all the bloom had vanished from it, with deep dark grey eyes, and very

rich fair hair, which lay in waved masses above her broad smooth brow, defined by the narrow rim of white under her close black bonnet. Her dress, which was very plain, was the deep mourning of a widow, but of the French style, except for the narrow cap-rim. The older lady was a bright cheery-looking person of perhaps five-and-thirty, rather stout, with very black eyes, a high colour, and an expression of vigilant kindness which rendered a plain face singularly attractive. Her mere manner of supporting the delicate hand and wrist resting on her substantial arm seemed to tell of intelligent care and tenderness. Her attire was of a thoroughly English type and rather overdone in point of colour. It was singular that the sight of these unobtrusive persons, who took no notice at all of them, seemed to affect Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and the lady to whom he was speaking simultaneously, and with equal force, for they both started and stared. Sir Wilfrid, however, recovered himself in an instant with a mut-

tered, "No ; it cannot be !" but the lady said :

"Surely, surely, that is Janet Monro ;" and unconscious of the astonishment which her words awakened in Sir Wilfrid, walked rapidly away from him, and approached the tall young lady in deep mourning with outstretched hand and the words : "Dear Mrs. Monro, I am equally surprised and delighted to meet you here !"

A bright flush, which instantly faded, passed over Mrs. Monro's face, strengthening the likeness that had struck Sir Wilfrid almost with bewilderment ; and a very sweet smile, nearly as evanescent, marked her recognition of the person who addressed her.

"And I little expected to see you, Mrs. Thornton."

The stout lady had fallen back a step, as Mrs. Monro removed the hand which had lain on her arm, that it might clasp that of Laura, and was looking with pleasure and interest at the brilliant face and the beautiful dress of the dazzling

little person—she looked little beside the tall bending figure of Mrs. Monro—who glanced at her too with lively curiosity.

“My friend, Miss Wells,” said Mrs. Monro; and then Laura shook hands with Miss Wells, and called to Sir Wilfrid Esdaile to come and be introduced to Mrs. Monro; and the other gentleman of Mrs. Thornton’s party, who had moved on to another point of view before she saw Mrs. Monro, returned, and Mr. Thornton was but little less glad than his wife to see the young widow in whom they had felt so strong an interest, the friend and neighbour of the old lady at the Stone House, far away in bleak Scotland. But Mr. Thornton was quick to see the change in the fair face and the slight figure, and he inquired about Mrs. Monro’s health with real solicitude.

Soon all the party were walking down the slope to their respective carriages, and Laura was trying hard to persuade Mrs. Monro that nothing would be so good for

her as a cruise in their yacht. *The Firefly*, it appeared, was in the harbour, and her owners had come to Nice only the day before. Laura had met several persons of her acquaintance already, but meeting Mrs. Monro was quite too delightful. She had so much to say and to hear. Where was Mrs. Monro staying? their hotel was on the Promenade; how delightful it would be if it proved to be Mrs. Monro's hotel also!


But this crowning satisfaction was not reserved for Laura. Mrs. Monro was living in the old town, “to be with Miss Wells,” she said briefly in explanation; and she was afraid it would be too much for her to visit Mrs. Thornton that day; the expedition to the Castle Hill had been a great undertaking for her. It was arranged that Laura should call upon her early on the following day, and the little party separated. Only a few sentences had been exchanged between Mrs. Monro and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, but she had told him that she had heard much of him from

her sister-in-law, Mrs. Dunstan ; and as Janet's new name was pronounced for the first time in his hearing, Sir Wilfrid glanced at Mrs. Thornton, thinking it must sound strangely to her too, but she did not seem to have heard it.

"You remember," wrote Mrs. Thornton to her cousin, a week afterwards, "the young widow whom I met in Scotland just after my marriage, Mrs. Monroe ; she is here, and I fear she is in very bad health indeed. I was near making such a blunder that I must tell you about it. We met Mrs. Monroe at the show place here, called the Castle Hill, and there was an odd, brisk, stout, kind-looking person with her, whom I took for a sort of superior maid, with a talent for the care of invalids, but Mrs. Monroe introduced her as her friend, Miss Wells. It turns out that Miss Wells is a 'character.' She has a large fortune, and spends it among the poor English at all sorts of foreign places, and stays a great deal at Nice, where she lives in the unfashionable quarter, in a

roomy old hotel, because her mother and sister—the only people she had belonging to her—died here, and are buried in that dreadfully pretty and melancholy cemetery. If there are any solitary and uncared-for people among the poor creatures who come here in numbers for a little prolongation of life, Miss Wells finds them out, and looks after them and cheers them up; and she is doing all these good things for Mrs. Monro, who is hopelessly ill, Mr. Thornton thinks, but I think she may get better in this delightful place.

"We have also met your hero, Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and renewed our acquaintance with him. He is very nice, but I wish he were not so fond of play, and so ready to make friends of people he does not know much about. He is not in a good set, from what Mr. Thornton has already observed, if, indeed, there is a good set here—among the playing people, I mean. One does see such dreadful-looking men, like the creatures with whom Becky Sharpe went to the ball where the




Marquis of Steyne and his scar met her, and women more dreadful still, if possible. Sir Wilfrid gets on better with Mr. Thornton than with me ; he is exceedingly polite and all that, but I don't think he likes me a bit. I should not have taken him for the sort of person you described—I mean merely in his ways ; he seems restless and easily bored, and not at all decided about what he is going to do. Mr. Thornton and he have been talking this morning about 'climbing' in the autumn, and Sir Wilfrid seems quite bitten with the idea, though he is not an Alpine man ; I wish they could set about it now, for it would be much better for him than the 'tapis vert,' and the people who surround it, and he has been so good to you, I cannot but like him.


“We had a talk about you and your plans yesterday, and he vows he will bring John Sandilands back from Ceylon, and there must be no more delay. He spoke with so much dislike of long engagements, and the slips between cup and lip in

human affairs, that I have a notion of my own about him. Mrs. Monro, whom I see every day, is full of her sister-in-law's marriage, and I have caught Sir Wilfrid looking at me once or twice when she has been asking him questions (which he answers in the vaguest way), very much as if Captain Dunstan had not kept his own counsel. If I am right that would account, considering that he and Sir Wilfrid are such friends, for his not being very cordially disposed towards me; and yet what nonsense, now that he has got over it, and is married, like myself. It was a little odd, don't you think, that marriage? For, after all, she was nobody, and he could hardly have been very violently in love. Men are never very good at descriptions of people, and Sir Wilfrid is no better than the rest; he is vague about Mrs. Dunstan, but says she is wonderfully like Mrs. Monro.

“Our plans are not quite settled; but I think we shall be here for another fortnight, and then go to Paris, and on to



London after a little time there. The house at Prince's Gate is nearly ready ; we get glowing accounts of it, but of course I shall put the finishing touches to it myself. And remember, dearest Julia, you must be there when we arrive. I wonder whether the Dunstons will be in town much this season—Sir Wilfrid says he does not think they have a house—at any rate, as I shall be keeping quiet, I shall not be likely to see them."



CHAPTER IV.

Laura.

IT was natural that Sir Wilfrid Esdaile should observe Mrs. Thornton a good deal more closely than he would have done had he met her again merely as one of the innumerable persons whom one sees everywhere for awhile, and then ceases to see. He would have studied her, with considerable curiosity, as the woman who had made so strong an impression on Dunstan, but later events lent her an even additional interest. She was the distant and indirect cause of his own haunting trouble, of the misfortune that had taken the good out of his life, and, as he was aware, when he would allow himself

to listen to the warning, out of himself also. If she had but waited for Dunstan, if she had had just enough constancy, and sufficient of the spirit of the gambler, who always believes in a coming turn of the luck, his luck would not have been so dead against him in the one great venture that had really been worth making in all his life. And how admirably Laura and Dunstan would have suited each other! Under any circumstances that could not have failed to strike Sir Wilfrid; but now, with the strongly contrasted image of Janet always in his mind's eye, he felt it at every turn; and, feeling it, found it more than ever difficult to account for Dunstan's marriage, and to reconcile himself to the idea of it. Could he really have come to care for Janet? Had he married her, for some inexplicable motive, without caring for her? In the latter case, Sir Wilfrid, though but little given to thinking of the forecasting kind, seemed in his fancy to see the foam and to hear the roar of breakers ahead.

He admired Laura excessively, as who could avoid admiring the brilliant and animated young woman on whom life was smiling so brightly, and who smiled back at life with responsive brightness? She was handsomer, or he thought her so now, than before her marriage; and her vivacity, her readiness to please and be pleased, and her unflagging spirits, rendered her charming to everybody. There was no more popular person among the English visitors to Nice that season than the beautiful Mrs. Thornton. Was she absolutely heartless, Sir Wilfrid wondered; did she take everything as lightly as she seemed to do; or had the marriage, in which, unless Dunstan had egregiously deceived himself from the first, her heart was not, turned out a perfect success after all?

The season was unusually fine; even the habitual grumblers, who were given to talk of the "treachery" of the climate, were satisfied for once; and Laura enjoyed her sojourn with thoroughness which had not yet yielded to the habit of wealth, and

the unlimited power of indulging her wishes and fancies. Prominent among the latter was her liking for Mrs. Monro; the impulsive regard with which the young widow had inspired her in Scotland, and which had certainly been due in part to the slight sense of boredom that had crept over her in the unrelieved society of her husband and his aunt, revived and strengthened on this their second meeting, and Laura derived great pleasure from the power of being useful to her friend.

"I always longed to have her with us," she said to Miss Wells, "away from that horrid cold place, and those dull skies and dismal mists; and you see how right I was; she is ever so much better. If she had only been with us at Naples and Palermo all the winter, she would be quite well by this time. Just look at her colour, and she does not cough once for every ten times she did ten days ago."


Laura had the hopefulness and the disbelief in serious illness, so long as the invalid can be up and about, that belongs

to persons who enjoy perfect health, and she persisted in considering Mrs. Monro merely "delicate." And, indeed, there were hopeful symptoms about her now, and, at least, she seemed to be reprieved. She took long drives with Laura, and even went for a short cruise in the yacht; on which occasion Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was one of the party on board *The Firefly*, and was so attentive to Mrs. Monro and her odd-looking friend that Miss Wells "quite took to him," as she expressed it, and they were all doubly sorry about the rumours that reached them concerning Sir Wilfrid's wildness. But the cruise, though the waves were like molten sapphires and the sky was like a dome of turquoise, was too much for Mrs. Monro, and she was unable to go out for some days after it, so that Laura had to come to her, which she did very willingly.

The acquaintance of Miss Wells with Nice, and the associations, so dear in spite of all their pain, that bound her to the place, were of old date, before the modern

extension and grandeur of the city ; and she adhered to the old places and ways. It was a roomy and comfortable, not a bright or luxurious abode in which Miss Wells had established her headquarters for several years ; the modern magnificence of the hotels affected by the Russian, American, and English visitors had no charms for her. She knew everybody in the old quarter, she would say, and everybody knew her : and, if the fancy should take her to go off to Jericho, she would have nothing to do but to lock her door, hang up her key on a nail in the dingy Bureau below, and go. She should find everything on her return exactly as she had left it and her comings and goings would surprise or concern nobody.

The rooms occupied by Miss Wells and her friend, whom she had established in her own quarters, after a brief inspection had satisfied her that this was a case for the active exercise of her own especial calling, were pleasantly situated on the second floor of a rambling old hotel—it no



longer exists—and they opened into a wide corridor which led to a staircase at either end. The rooms, which were lofty, with tall windows commanding a lovely view, communicated with each other from one extremity of the corridor to the other; and between the rooms at one end, which did not belong to Miss Wells, and the rooms at the other end, which did belong to her, there was, as was generally the case with buildings of the period of this hotel, merely an ordinary door, not “condemned,” only locked. In this one a square pane of greenish glass was inserted in the upper panel—no one could divine with what purpose, for it was too high to be looked through, and it admitted no light, as the door was in the cross-wall close to the outer wall, while the windows were on the opposite side. Miss Wells had a notion that this unreasonable little window in the door had been made to enable somebody to watch a mad person unseen, in the time when the hotel was a private house belonging to an old Savoyard family; but it

was in the upper panel, and the invisible eye in that case must have been set in the head of a giant. A heavy table, laden with books, was placed across the door with the window in it; and the room, which was pleasant and less bare than the others of the suite, was appropriated to Mrs. Monro.

Well cared for by the brisk and clever woman, whose warmest feelings were enlisted on her behalf, the young widow was very peaceful in these later days. She was under no delusion about her own state; she was quite happy in the conviction that she had but a short time to live, and the serenity that came with that certainty enabled her to take more interest in others than she had taken since the sea had swallowed up all the meaning and value of her life. Miss Wells's only brother had been saved from the shipwreck in which Kenneth Monro was lost, and had brought home the intelligence; but he died shortly afterwards in the very room which Mrs. Monro now occupied. This

was the link between the strangely-contrasted friends.

On their quiet and inevitably sad life Laura shone like a sunbeam, warming and brightening it, and was very welcome. She was delighted with Miss Wells, and proud of her conquest of that rather sturdy-natured person, who had a theoretical aversion to fine ladies, but in reality regarded with pleased curiosity the *faits et gestes* of a brilliant creature of the human butterfly order, whose ways were so entirely different from her own. Laura's beauty and Laura's dress were objects of unwearying admiration to Miss Wells, whose own looks had never occupied her attention, and whose own attire was of a florid description.

"You could not imitate that sort of thing," said Miss Wells; "you must be born to it to dress as Mrs. Thornton does—just as if everything she wears was specially invented for her! And did you ever see a man so much in love with his wife as Mr. Thornton is? He really seems to

have no eyes or ears for anyone but her. If she was to be spoilt, I think he must certainly spoil her."

"I fancy she gets a good deal of spoiling from everyone. I am sure she does from you," returned Mrs. Monro, smiling; "but she bears it very well. She has a kindly nature, if not a deep one, and is not hardened by happiness."

This was a true judgment. Laura Thornton was supremely happy in those days. She had only two troubles—if, indeed, they could be called such. One was, that she could not have her father with her until after her return to England; the other was, that Mr. Thornton had taken it into his head to wish that the child, for whose birth she might look in the autumn, should see the light in his own country. Of course, the child was to be a son; everything was so prosperous with Laura that she never doubted that; but always thought of the coming baby as "he," and she understood, if she did not share, her husband's feelings.

It was not, however, as if the house at the Mains was ready to receive them ; in that case there would be a perfect fitness of things, and the grandson of the self-made man ought to be born in the mansion that in the future was to be ancestral ; but Laura did not take kindly to the prospect of the Stone House and old Miss Thornton. She thought Hunsford and Lady Rosa would be better than that. However, since Robert had old-fashioned notions about her needing to be with somebody, and regarded the event with a degree of solemnity which she hardly comprehended, she would not oppose his wishes. He was so good to her in all things, that he really deserved so much concession, and she must have a spell of dulness somewhere under any circumstances. So she behaved very well about this prospect, consoling herself with the reflection that it was still distant, and that Paris and London lay between, and finding a great deal of pleasure in her life in the meantime.

To the childless woman for whom life was slowly but surely closing, Laura's light way of regarding the benediction of motherhood was strange and a little jarring; but she did not blame Laura, for she knew, at least in theory, that this was the way of Laura's "world," and that she was only as the training and associations of her previous life had made her. She could even be amused by Laura's stories of the serious epistles with which Miss Thornton favoured her, and which contained precepts of a kind which would have had a chance of being followed half a century or so earlier in the history of the world. Laura had a clear perception of the absurd side of everything, and she laughed unrestrainedly at the anticipatory anxieties of the spinster aunt who had had charge of Robert Thornton's childhood, and who seemed to remember every hour of it with a distinctness which a mother could hardly emulate. To Mrs. Monro, who knew the old lady so well, the spirited de-

scription had a pleasantly characteristic meaning.

"I do believe," said Laura, "she sees him in knickerbockers and the Latin grammar already."

"And Lady Rosa Chumleigh?" asked Miss Wells, to whose imagination a Lady Rosa, with such a daughter as Laura, was a most fortunate and enviable personage. "I suppose she is equally pleased and anxious?"

Laura was on the point of saying that Lady Rosa regarded the prospect of becoming a grandmother with a good deal of indifference, but she checked herself. She was too well-bred to yield to the temptation of saying unpleasant things about her own mother to a stranger, however strongly the contrast struck her sense of humour; but, as a matter of fact, Lady Rosa had dismissed the matter in three lines, briefly recommending Laura to take care of herself, and to be sure to see an English doctor wherever she might be.

The notion of Scotland was too ridiculous. Why should Laura not remain in her own house in London?

The utterances of Lady Rosa were not sympathetic, but Laura had never expected that they would be; so that it was not any disappointed or hurt feeling which made her say nothing to Mr. Thornton of her mother's letter. It was a kind of shame and pity for that mother—a feeling different from the mere weariness and vexation that Lady Rosa used to produce in her mind. So much influence the higher order of character with which she had associated of late had on Laura that she began to see the soul of things, not very distinctly or very willingly as yet, but so that among friends judicious enough to admit that Laura could be improved—Miss Thornton, for instance, and Julia Carmichael—an improvement in her would have been acknowledged.

Had she learned to love her husband? Had she come to prize the love which raised her to such an eminence as she had

perception enough to appreciate, and just a little to dread, as the greatest of treasures and the richest of blessings, in comparison with which every external feature of her most enviable lot was but insignificant? No. Laura had learned to like her husband very much; to feel as much respect for him as she was capable of feeling, for respect is a sentiment which needs cultivation in the mind; and to be so well assured and confident of her own power over him that she no longer felt vaguely uncomfortable, and as if some constant effort were required of her, in consequence of the pedestal upon which his devotion and his fancy set her. At first she had felt that there was a standard of some sort in his mind which she did not clearly comprehend, but which she was quite sure she should not attain to, and she hated to feel this, to have an uneasy consciousness that she was not what he supposed her, but that uneasiness had left her. It would never have existed had Laura known what real love meant, or been able to un-

derstand aright the love she had won. From the moment in which Robert Thornton perceived that a solitude *à deux* was not Laura's notion of happiness, he relinquished the project of continuing to find his in it, and she had enjoyed all the novelty and pleasure of foreign travel and society to her heart's content. With the yacht in attendance, they had sojourned wheresoever she fancied during the winter, and he had schooled himself into content with the share she gave him of her heart, her sympathy, and her company. He had expected too much at first; she had known at once too much and too little of the world; too much to be unconscious of its attractions, too little to be convinced of its emptiness, and wearied of its exactions; he must be patient, and the paradisaical time would come. It would surely come with the child, who, if a new claimant upon Laura's heart, would, at least, be one with whom he could bear to share it, one of whom he could never feel the smallest pang of jealousy, for whom, on the con-

trary, he might be jealous, if the deeper depths of his wife's nature were not stirred by the new and sacred touch.

Laura had early discerned in her husband's disposition that tendency to jealousy which is in some cases merely an attribute of temper, but in others is the inseparable defect of the quality of strong and deep affections. She was a clear-headed person enough, and she made up her mind never to provoke the demon, as much, to do her justice, for his sake as for her own. She had had her little spark of romance in her life, and she had trodden it out, deliberately, if not altogether of her own free will. And she had no reason to complain that the reality she had taken in exchange had disappointed her in any way. To the "might have been" she never voluntarily turned her thoughts, after the first pain and bitterness of her interview with Edward Dunstan had passed away; and, if a speculation about how they should meet, if ever, where and when, crossed them, it was not attended by much solicitude.

Laura was not of a disposition to feel apprehension about the future; she carried out the maxim which in homely phrase bids us not "bid the devil good-morrow till we meet him." No doubt she had been a little sorry for herself, and a good deal sorry for Dunstan, but both feelings passed, and only a vague revival of them attended her contemplated return to England. Charming, popular, and admired as she was, the most jealous husband could have found no fault with her; her manners were quite free from coquetry, and her easy, eager enjoyment of all the pleasures of society was of the frankest and most earnest kind. Thus, except in the sense of a disappointed hope of what her feelings towards himself might come to be, a sense which was revealing to him, little by little, the truth that he had expected of her what there was not in her the capacity to give, Robert Thornton never felt the serpent's fang.

We have seen how Captain Dunstan speculated on what might possibly be

Laura's feelings concerning his marriage, and, though he was mistaken in supposing that her self-complacency would be rudely shaken, it would be vain to deny that Laura did hear of the event with a twinge of mortification. She would not have acknowledged it to herself, and she would have been profoundly disgusted at the bare notion that anyone could have suspected it; nevertheless she had let it out to Julia. It was very soon, she thought, after all his protestations and his despair. He had got over that pretty quickly, just like a man! However, she had no business, and no inclination to think at all about it; and, though she could not help feeling just a little curiosity, she would carefully avoid indulging it by asking questions either of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile or Mrs. Monro. She was tolerably certain that Sir Wilfrid, having been with Dunstan at Southampton, must know something, if not all; and if Dunstan had told his wife, as was not unlikely—for her triumph would but be augmented by a vivid

picture of Laura's fickleness and mercenary behaviour, as he, having got over his love for her, would be sure to paint them—what more likely than that his wife would feel curious about her, and question Mrs. Monro. In case she did so, there should at least be no curiosity on Laura's side to report. Thus it happened that, after the one casual mention of Mrs. Dunstan on the day of their meeting on the Castle Hill, she was never again referred to by Laura and Mrs. Monro.

The brief attack of hurt vanity from which Laura suffered was much assuaged by the reflection that the fact of Dunstan's marriage removed from her own path the one little difficulty which lay in it. She had nothing to fear from his impetuosity now; his own fickleness, his own readiness to obliterate the past by a new tie, had amply condoned hers. It was not a very long step, for Laura's active fancy, from this consoling consideration to wondering where and how she and Mrs. Dunstan should meet, what they would think of

each other, and whether Dunstan's Janet was as charming as her Janet. The dead past buried itself with wholesome celerity in Laura's case. She drew several pictures in her imagination of the meeting which, in the nature of things, was to be.

Not one of those pictures prefigured, ever so remotely, the truth of the meeting between Laura Thornton and Edward Dunstan's wife.

Mrs. Monroe was again better towards the close of Laura's stay at Nice, and able to drive out with her friend. *The Firefly* was to make one last cruise along the coast, with Mr. Thornton and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile on board, before going home. They were a pleasant party at the embarkation. Laura, Mrs. Monroe, and Miss Wells were to drive to Beaulieu after they had taken leave of the gentlemen, whose return was to be looked for in three days.

"I am glad to keep Esdaile out of mischief even for so short a time," Mr. Thornton had said to his wife that morn-

ing, "and you must keep him up to coming on to Paris with us. He is horribly reckless, and the set here is worse than ever, if possible."

The farewells were spoken, with smiles and good wishes on the part of the ladies. Mr. Thornton foretold a delightful cruise, and added fame for *The Firefly*. Miss Wells promised him that she would be responsible for Laura's taking care of herself during his cruise. He had taken leave of her, and was about to step into the boat, when he turned back, said something to her in a whisper, and kissed her. When they drove away, her companions saw that Laura's eyes were full of tears.

CHAPTER V.

A Wing of the Firefly.

T was only an unusually emphatic entreaty that she would take care of herself during his absence, with a word of reference to the hope that rendered her health doubly precious to him, which Robert Thornton had addressed to his wife at parting, and which had strangely touched her. He rarely gave expression in words to his absorbing love of her; contenting himself with the anticipation of her wishes, and the moulding of his life upon her tastes. He had discerned, in very early days, with the sure instinct of a great affection, that Laura was unsentimental; and, although he never imagined that an

impatience of sentiment could, in her case, be a symptom of shallowness of feeling, he was extremely sensitive to the slightest touch of the ridiculous being associated in her mind with his love for her. Thus, while every day brought her, in the laying out of its hours, tributes of his affection, his care, his forethought, his devotion, he dealt little in endearing epithets, or verbal compliments to the beauty and the charm which held his heart as securely as they had won it promptly.

Perhaps it was because she was so bright and happy, the weather so lovely, the sunshine so vivid, the face of nature so smile-bedecked, because freedom, and wealth, and the power of pleasing were such good things to own; perhaps it was because the deeper chords of her nature were being stirred by the new interest and meaning that were coming into her life; but there was in Laura's heart, while those tears stood in her eyes, a warmer and deeper feeling towards her husband than had ever been there before, and in her

intelligence a truer comprehension of him. She had at that moment at least a glimpse of the worth of the undivided love and perfect loyalty of such a heart as his. She wished he had not been leaving her. She felt as if there was something she wanted to say to him; she did not know what, exactly; it would have come to her if he had not gone away. A strange, incredibly clear, and rapid vision of her life since she had first seen him passed through Laura's mind before the brief silence between herself and her companions was broken.

The impression of the morning was not transitory, and the first practical form that it took was one which Laura knew would be pleasing to her husband. After their drive, and when she had left her friends at their own abode, she devoted the remainder of the afternoon to writing to Miss Thornton. Laura felt herself "good" while she was doing this, and she wanted to feel "good" that day. It was never an easy task for her to write to Miss Thorn-

ton. The old lady's views were so different from Laura's, and she held them with so much energy and decision—she was so entirely ignorant of Laura's "world," and disposed to hold it in such slight esteem, that there was reasonable ground for Laura's remissness as a correspondent; it was not all mere laziness, as Mr. Thornton said it was, when he gently urged her to show the fitting respect to his only relative.

"Just be yourself in your letters," he would say to Laura, when she objected that it was difficult to write; and she had never liked to say to him that it was that "just herself" which had not been fortunate enough to captivate the aunt as thoroughly as the nephew.

On the present occasion, however, her task was not at all difficult; there was one subject which she could always make interesting to Miss Thornton, and that was the very subject on which she felt inclined to write. She would give Miss Thornton a full, true, and particular history of Robert's proceedings—she thought of him

as "Robert" this time, and was conscious of the strangeness of the word in her thoughts—since they had arrived at Nice; she would tell her about *The Firefly*; and finally, she would wind up by making a positive promise that the expected heir should be born in Scotland. She had not quite assented to Robert's wishes on that point, though she had no real intention of opposing them; she had been tiresome, capricious, and careless about it—not one of these epithets had he ever applied to her in his thoughts—and he would be so glad when he came back to know that she had written such a letter. And she would enclose one of the photographs of Robert that had just been sent home; there had not been time to look at them.

Laura went to her husband's room to find the parcel, and lingered there awhile, idly touching the things on the dressing-table, and turning over the books. A portrait of herself was placed upon an easel by the window. "If we were only to stay in a place for a day," thought

Laura, "he would have that unpacked and set up." She found the parcel of photographs, and looked at them all, selecting the best for Miss Thornton. Robert made a good photograph, she thought; the strong, placid, truthful, manly face came out well under the scrutiny of the sunlight. She propped the little card-portrait up on her desk, and glanced at it many times while she was writing, with smiles which would have fallen like sunbeams on Robert Thornton's heart, if he could have seen them.

Her letter completed, it was time for Laura to dress for a dinner to which she was engaged for that evening, at the villa of a Russian princess. She wished she had not said she would go, and let Robert arrange that she should take Sir John and Lady Carteret in her carriage; she felt disposed for a quiet evening with a book. It would have been quite another thing if Robert had been with her. Dressing was a bore. There were some gowns in a box just come from Paris, and she had thought

of wearing one of them, but she changed her mind. She would wear a gown which Robert had noticed a day or two previously, and, as ornaments, her cats'-eyes. What trouble Robert had taken about those beautiful jewels!—what a fine set he had succeeded in getting!

The shifting shimmer of the gems became the sparkling little beauty well, and never had Laura looked more sparkling or more beautiful than she looked that night, when all the new-comers at the Princess's reception who did not know her asked who she was, and all who did were anxious to proclaim the possession of that privilege. Laura's spirits rose high; she was pleased with the company, satisfied with herself, and honestly wishing all the time that her husband were by her side.

The moon was shining over the Bay of the Angels when Laura came back to the fashionable hotel in the Promenade des Anglais, and its rays turned to the likeness of silver wings the distant sails on the horizon. *The Firefly's* were not of the

number, Laura knew; she was a swift vessel, even without steam, and was far far away by this time, distinguishing herself, doubtless, during her last cruise for the season. The town, and the gardens, the background of hills, the jutting-out promontory, the wide, calm expanse of steel-blue sea under the wide, calm expanse of steel-blue sky, with the lesser lights that rule the night ablaze in it; the atmosphere so clear and light that every object was defined with a blade-like sharpness; all made up a picture on which not the most accustomed eyes could rest without a fresh sense of calm and elevated pleasure. Laura looked out of her window at the scene for long after she was left alone, with a deeper feeling than its beauty had ever before aroused in her, and said to herself when at length she turned away: "And it must be equally still and beautiful all along the coast. A glorious night at sea."

The morning showed a change; the wind was chill, the sky was overcast,

and Laura's daily message of inquiry for Mrs. Monroe was answered by Miss Wells to the effect that she would not venture to go out that day. Laura had made some engagements, but she did not feel inclined to fulfil them; she was in an idle mood, and disposed for nothing more lively than a visit to her friends in the old town. She sent her excuses to the people who would expect to see her, and wished it was not too early to call on Mrs. Monroe. It had not occurred to Laura that she should feel lonely and weary just because Robert was to be away on a three days' cruise; too lonely and weary to avail herself of the precautions he had taken to provide for her pleasure and amusement; but it was so, and the society of two persons, who had nothing at all in common with the bright and pleasure-loving world in which Laura habitually lived, was the only resource to which she could turn without distaste against the depression that was stealing over her.

And, somehow, she thought differently to-

between yesterday and to-day, to inspire her with thoughts such as she had never had previously, and make her afraid? Her prosperous young life lay all around and ahead of her, bright and smiling like the summer sea of yesterday; and it could hardly be that a few hours' solitude and a change of weather had affected her so strongly.

The pleasant motherly manner of Miss Wells became downright petting where Laura was concerned, and she was amusingly interested in the "goings on" of the gay, busy, and great people, into whose ways and customs she got no more than side peeps, through the nooks and crannies of gossip.


Mrs. Monro was asleep when Laura arrived, and having gladdened Miss Wells with the announcement that she meant to remain "quite hours," installed herself in the spacious sitting-room at the end of the apartment. When they had talked awhile of the invalid, Laura with more than usual seriousness, and Miss Wells cheerfully

enough, though with thorough conviction of the hopeless nature of the case, Laura had to tell of the grandeurs and gaieties of the preceding evening, the emeralds and opals of the Grand Duchess, and the "historic" lace of the Princess. She saw that Miss Wells was a little worn and anxious, and so she exerted herself for her amusement, and to turn the current of her ideas.

While Laura was doing this, her thoughts were busy with Miss Wells' life; she was trying to realise its self-sacrifice, and to imagine in what its rewards, which were distinctly not tangible or ostensible, might possibly consist. Her large income was expended upon the sick and suffering, its "margin" was what she allotted to herself; her time and strength, the skill and patience, the tenderness and cheerfulness which were evident to all—and how infinitely precious to those for whose service she lived, only the sick and sorrowing could tell—were theirs also. How did she do it; and what was her reward? With

the strange sense upon her, that had come yesterday, and been growing all to-day, that she was learning something strange and vague which would have to clear itself in her mind and then be learned in its full extent and meaning, Laura listened to the stories of Miss Wells' experiences, which she induced her to tell, the gossip being exhausted, and felt herself drawn more and more to this woman, so homely and so good.

The long talk was uninterrupted, for when Mrs. Monro awoke, and Miss Wells left Laura and went to her, she preferred to be left quiet for the time. So the hours went on, and Laura was about unwillingly to take her leave and return to dine in solitary state at her hotel, when a servant came to tell Miss Wells that a person, who was waiting in the vestibule, wanted to see her. Miss Wells excused herself to Laura, begged that she would not go away—this was merely a message from one of her poor people, no doubt; nothing to detain her—and left the room.



"That is, I suppose," thought Laura, "one of the best women in the world; who never did a deliberately wrong act, and very likely has done very few accidentally wrong ones. And yet, if I had done anything awful, and was sorry for it, and wanted to be helped out of it, I would come and tell her, and be quite sure that she would help me. Why, I wonder? There's more in it than her having taken a fancy to me, and I to her. And if—if trouble and sorrow were to come to me, I think she would show me how to bear them."

She shivered, drew her mantle round her, walked to the window and looked out, left the window and turned over the music that lay scattered on the piano. Thus several minutes passed, and Laura was beginning to wonder at the prolonged absence of Miss Wells, when the door opened, and Mrs. Monro, wearing a white Indian shawl over her widow's dress, but trembling with cold notwithstanding, entered the room. Laura greeted her

with surprise and delight, saying that she had not hoped to see her that day at all.

"And our days at Nice are getting few," she added, "so that I grudge one." All the time she was thinking how dreadfully ill Mrs. Monro was looking, much worse than she had yet seen her look, and that her days were also getting few.

"I want you to stay with me this evening," said Mrs. Monro, who uttered her words with a strange difficulty. "You will, I am sure. I felt so sure, that I told them to send away your carriage. You do not mind dining without dressing, for once."

Her eyes wandered; she seemed hardly conscious of what she was saying; she sank into a chair, and panted for breath, while the damps of suffering or of agitation gathered on her lips and forehead.

"Of course I will stay," said Laura, bending over her in great distress and solicitude. "I am very glad to stay, very grateful to you for asking me, for I was just thinking how dull and dreary an

evening I should have to pass, all alone, and I really cannot go out without Robert. You are in pain—you are very, very ill!" she added, for Mrs. Monro had uttered a distinct groan.

"No, no, it will pass away in a moment." But she caught Laura's hand and pressed it against her own closed eyes, and she trembled in every limb.

No thought except of Mrs. Monro's illness crossed Laura's mind as she bent over her, in the perplexity of ignorance, wishing with all her heart that Miss Wells would come, and that she herself were more useful and capable of helping others.

The person who was waiting in the vestibule to see Miss Wells proved to be one of the servants from the hotel at which Mr. and Mrs. Thornton were staying, and his errand was to request her to accompany him on the instant to the presence of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile. A pencilled line from Sir Wilfrid, which the man put into her hands, confirmed the message, and added that the writer knew

Mrs. Thornton was with her, and had to entreat Miss Wells to come at once without letting her know.

"Where is he?" This was all Miss Wells said.

The man led her along the corridor, and opening the outer door of the room which adjoined the last one of her own suite, and into which the senseless little window in the cross-door looked, let her pass through.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, who was restlessly pacing the room on the farther side, came towards Miss Wells, showing her a face more changed and ghastly than she had ever seen on a living man. She shrank back, and faltered out :

"What is it? What has happened? The yacht—"

"Yes! No! Oh, Miss Wells, what are we to do? He is dead! How is she to be told? I found out at the hotel that she was here, and I have come to you."

They stood opposite each other in silence for a full minute; then Miss Wells made a

sign to him to speak, and, covering her face with her hands, listened.

“The weather had been beautiful all day, the wind fair, and the yacht behaving splendidly. The night was also beautiful, and we stayed up talking until after midnight. I left him, and went below, and then—I don’t know quite how it happened, nobody can tell exactly—there was a change of wind, and they were doing something with the sails. I know as little as you of such things, and can’t explain anything but the dreadful facts; I don’t know whether anybody is to blame—he did not see what was doing, or they did not see him—he was struck, by the fluttering sail, I suppose, by some part of the tackle, at all events, and fell overboard. I was up in a moment, and we saw him.—We saw him in the smooth sea under the bright moonlight; he was keeping himself up in the water, and it seemed as though he could easily catch the ropes that were out in a moment. It seemed, too, only a minute or two, and yet an age, until a boat was

lowered, but in that minute he had gone down. I was at the side, and looking at him. I don't know whether the men felt any great alarm; I did, but that is because I know nothing of the sea and ships; I think they had no thought but that he would be saved. I saw his face as he dropped his head and went down. We rowed about for hours, until long after it was daylight—the men did it because I asked them, useless as it was—then we brought the yacht back. There is a crowd at the harbour now, and all is known at the hotel. Thank Heaven his poor wife is here. How will she bear it? How is she to be told?"

"I don't know," said Miss Wells, faintly; and pointing to the wall with a shaking hand, "she is there, happy, hopeful, beautiful, and I don't know how she is to be told. I cannot do it, if that is what you mean."

"Yes; that is what I mean," said Sir Wilfrid, solemnly. "Think that she is quite alone, except for her servants, and

that I am only a man! She must not leave this, and go back to the hotel ignorant of what has occurred; she would hear it in the street, or from the people here."

"Ah," said Miss Wells, with a start; "there's the danger. She may not have waited for me. Stay here until I come back."

He remained in the fast darkening room. Presently she returned, and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile saw in her face, which had lost the expression of terror, that she would do what he asked, and was nerving herself for the task.

"I have sent Mrs. Monro to persuade her to remain with us; she will not suspect her, as she knows she has been very ill to-day; and I could not see her yet. But I will do it, Sir Wilfrid, though it is like taking up a knife to kill her. Just after she has been talking out her happy young heart to me."

"It is dreadful, but it must be done. And there are arrangements, statements—" Sir Wilfrid paused, struck anew by the

awfulness of the vanishing away of the man who had been with them but yesterday, a very type of the enviable among human beings. If they could have taken Laura to him, as he lay in that great calm of death which at least stills the revolt and tempest of grief, there would have been less dread over them both for the result of what she had to be told ; but this resource was not theirs, the solace of the last farewell was not to be hers. The bark of her happiness had indeed

“——gone down at sea,
When Heaven was all tranquillity.”

“ When she has been told, it will be best to telegraph for her father ; but the first thing is to tell her. I will remain here.”

“ No ; come to my rooms.”

He followed her at once. A little group of people had gathered at the head of the stair ; the man from the other hotel was talking, and being talked to, in whispers. There was a dead silence as Miss Wells and Sir Wilfrid Esdaile came along the

corridor, and, taking no notice of them, entered the other apartment.

"I have never seen you so ill," Laura was saying, as Miss Wells came into the room, and approached Mrs. Monro and herself, "and you are frightened. Is there anything very unusually wrong with you? Oh, I am so glad you have come back. She is—but you are frightened too. What is it?"

She let go Mrs. Monro's hand, and stood upright.

"I am frightened, my dear," and Miss Wells came quickly, and put her arms round her, "frightened for you. I have come to tell you bad news; news of a very great sorrow—the greatest that could come to you."

"Papa!" exclaimed Laura, clutching Miss Wells with both her hands. "Papa! Is he dead!"

"No, no. Let me hold you while you hear it; and try, try to bear it, for his sake, and his child's."

"Robert?"



She said only that one word ; she saw the answer that Miss Wells could not speak ; she lifted her hands and pushed her hair off her forehead, then, with a wild white smile, dropped between the arms that strove in vain to hold her, as if she had been shot.

CHAPTER VI.

"Too Late."

"**I**T is totally impossible for your uncle to go to her, and I am sure I don't know what is to be done !"

Thus spoke Lady Rosa Chumleigh, in accents of dismay, to Julia Carmichael, some time after Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's telegram had reached Hunsford. The message arrived in the evening, and was received by Lady Rosa, in the absence of the Colonel, on the invalid list, and a prisoner to his room with a persistent fit of the gout, which severely tried Lady Rosa's temper, and invariably found it wanting. Julia was with her, and it is needless to say that the in-

telligence of Mr. Thornton's death caused them both a great shock, and keen though differently felt sorrow. Lady Rosa's heart was not sufficiently tender, nor was her imagination of a sufficiently vivid kind, to force her into a realisation of the grief and the terror of her daughter's position, so that she was not rendered powerless by the pain of such a picture in her mind. Happily her practical habits exerted their influence, and long before Julia could get beyond a horrified vision of Laura, and a dread of how this news might affect the Colonel, Lady Rosa was revolving the question of the moment—what was to be done?

“Let me see the telegram again.” Julia handed the green paper, on which she had been vacantly gazing, to Lady Rosa.

“It does not say that Laura wishes her father to go to her. ‘Colonel Chumleigh had better come as soon as possible;’ that is Sir Wilfrid Esdaile's own message.”

“Yes; but Laura would of course wish it. She would not have been able to send any message of her own; she would have

known nothing, been consulted about nothing under such circumstances.”

“True. And there’s no one there with any sense, I daresay; her servants are all fools, and all ignorant and selfish, no doubt; besides, she could not be left to them at any rate.”

“Sir Wilfrid has plenty of sense, and the kindest heart in the world; and there is her friend Mrs. Monro, and that Miss Wells whom Laura said so much about in her last letter. She is not alone, thank Heaven; but still——”

“They are not her own people, and none of them can bring her home. What can be done? I cannot leave your uncle. And I am a wretched person on such occasions, even if I could go to Nice.”

“Let me go,” said Julia, by a sudden impulse. “My going will be better than nothing. At least I can take care of her on her journey home. I can take Freeman, and start to-morrow morning. My uncle will not object, I am sure. Do let me telegraph to Sir Wilfrid that I am coming.”

On reflection this did seem to be the best thing that could be done, and Lady Rosa went to the Colonel's room on the sad errand of telling him what had befallen his darling daughter.

The intelligence affected Colonel Chumleigh very deeply. He had liked Robert Thornton much, and trusted him thoroughly; he had felt perfect ease and security with regard to Laura, founded on the worth and the steadiness of her husband's character; and it had afforded him a great deal of quiet pleasure to indulge in imaginary pictures—of which no one would have suspected Colonel Chumleigh—of Laura, her home, and her children in the future years. In all the details of the house that was being prepared for her in London, the Colonel had taken the utmost interest, and his chief pleasure was the reading of the frequent long talky letters, as Laura called them, which she wrote to him from the various points of her foreign sojourn. He remembered with a pang what a continuous record of Robert Thornton's love

and care, of her own happiness and prosperity, those letters formed; he murmured impatiently against the pain and helplessness that held him back from his poor child—his bright Firefly, with her wings so sadly singed—wondering how it was with her, whether in her youth and strength she had found a resource against the dread and the anguish that had overtaken her, sufficient, at least, to prevent her from being quite prostrated by them. The most difficult thing for Lady Rosa and the Colonel was to realise that the dreadful event had happened so recently, that their daughter's widowhood was not yet two days old. Like all who hear of a calamity at a distance, they felt at first as if it were impossible, then as if it had happened long ago. It was Lady Rosa's usual way to treat every contrariety in the light of a personal injury and insult, offered, whether by Providence or by inferior persons, to an individual of her exalted station and merit, out of spite; but the suddenness and the extent of this disaster overbore her usual

way, and by appalling softened her. The father and mother talked of their child, far off in her great trouble, and of Robert Thornton, with more unity of feeling than was at all habitual to them. The Colonel's distress at being unable to go to Laura was keen, and he immediately assented to Julia's undertaking the journey that was impossible to himself.

Many hours of the night passed in dreary conjecture and sorrowful reminiscence. They were not unmindful of Miss Thornton, and wondered whether the sad intelligence had yet been communicated to her. And then they remembered what a great significance, in addition to its sadness, the death of her nephew would have for the old lady in the lonely house in Scotland.

"To think," said Lady Rosa, "that so much depends upon Laura's health holding out now. If the baby is not born, or does not live, the poor old lady will be a very rich woman. However, there's one comfort, she would certainly leave it all to Laura. She cared for nobody but Robert,

and he cared for nobody but Laura, so that she will be safe, I should think, in any case. It will make a terrible difference to her, though, if she has to come in after the old lady. Of course there will be no change in any way until the child comes to settle everything.”

At this point the Colonel ceased to be able to follow the speculations of Lady Rosa. He could only dwell on the cruel destruction that might come to all the hopes of his daughter, on his own fears for her health, on the sudden setting of the sun on so fair a day, and his dread that to the early fallen night might be added a deeper darkness still. He was growing old, and Laura might be left without her father before long, and her mother and she never agreed, even when Laura was a girl at home, and had acted, very much for his sake, on the principle of “anything for a quiet life.” The Colonel was deeply troubled; so deeply that it seemed to him all that had troubled him previously in his life had been mere vexations. His son’s


boyish mischief, Lady Rosa's railing, the "tightness" of money from which he had never been quite delivered ; all these seemed of little account to him now, when one of the really tragic events of human existence came full upon his intimate perception, and the person concerned most nearly was the darling of his own heart.

He was pleased with Julia, and grateful to her. She was showing good sense and character ; she had greatly matured of late ; he had noticed that more than once. She got on better with Lady Rosa than Laura had ever done, and he fancied she generally had much more of her own way. She was very different from Laura, much better fitted to battle with the world. There was not much fight in his Firefly ; a fairy, queen-like wilfulness and sunny fortunateness had been hers hitherto ; the first blow dealt her by fate was a tremendous one. Would she be completely felled and incapacitated by it ?

The weight of these and many other thoughts was heavy upon the slow-think-

ing Colonel, and so oppressed him that after Julia had taken leave of him the next morning, before she started on her journey, what with the burden of them, and that of his pain, he almost wished he could have done, as the people in the Bible seemed to find it so easy to do—turned his face to the wall, and died.

It had occurred to Julia that it would be well to give Sir Wilfrid Esdaile an opportunity of communicating with her, in case there should be anything that Laura wanted, and she had telegraphed that on reaching London she would go to Mr. Thornton's house in Prince's Gardens. This she did, and was received by the housekeeper, who handed her a second telegram from Sir Wilfrid, to the effect that Laura was pretty well, and most thankful to know that her cousin was coming to her. The housekeeper informed her that she had been instructed to prepare for the reception of Mrs. Thornton, who would come to London as soon as she was able to travel.



“And a sad coming home too,” she added.

Julia had to dispose of some hours before she could start for Dover, and she employed a portion of the time in going over the house. It was with a half-stunned feeling, in which there seemed to be an unreal, impossible side to the awful reality that was oppressing her mind, that she wandered through the rooms.

Though the smaller touches of individual taste, and the comfortable air of habitation, were wanting to the house, it had not the more formal and staring grandeur of a mansion which has been fitted up by a fashionable upholsterer, according to a hardly-limited order. The decorations and the furniture were neither slavish in their following of a school, nor fantastic in the avoidance of sameness, and there was nothing to mark the vulgar exultation of wealth in the beautiful, costly, but simple abode which the son of the self-made man had prepared for his wife.

Not the strictest or the most exclusive

of the noble Nesses could have desired a more perfect suite of rooms for herself than that of which Robert Thornton had carefully considered all the details that were to render them worthy of his Laura; not the self-made man, Robert's father himself, in the old days at Bedford Square, had been content with plainer furniture and simpler surroundings than those of the rooms intended for the master of the house.

Julia recognised the manliness and simplicity which she had admired in the friend they had all lost when she passed through his “own rooms,” which were never to know him, with the pain of that loss at her heart, and saw how they testified to his contempt for the effeminacy and self-indulgence of the day. He disliked *bric-à-brac* and *bibelots*, gimcrackery of all kinds, as much as he disliked fine clothes, and would almost as soon have told a falsehood, or maligned a friend, as he would have stuck china plates about his study, or worn a velvet morning-coat. The only

articles de luxe in the "own rooms" of the master, whose foot was never to cross their threshold, were books. Of them there was a noble store—one that would have astonished the self-made man, who in his time had not held with books, with which, indeed, the origin of his fortunes had had no connection. His portrait, in a brown coat, and a wig of the same colour, and seemingly similar texture, occupied a place of honour in the study, and Julia recognised in that fact also a trait of Robert Thornton's character.

It seemed to her that the life that had been hoped for, looked for, the life that was never to be, came to her imagination rather as a vision of the past than as a mere phantom ; she thought of the future, of Laura, there, in that house, the widow of him who had set the impress of his taste and the testimony of his love so strongly upon it all, with inexpressible pity and pain.

Julia had completed her survey of the upper rooms, and was getting ready to

resume her journey, when another message reached her. This time the sender was Laura herself. “Pray rest for a few hours in Paris. Rooms are retained for me at Meurice’s. Go there, and come on by the night train.”

Julia’s first idea was to disregard this injunction. She did not think she should be tired, and her chief object was to reach Laura with as little delay as possible. She reckoned, however, without that troublesome element, her maid. Absorbed in anticipation of the scene to which she was hastening, busy with the past and the future, Julia did not think about the weather, and was indifferent to fatigue; but Freeman had no such motives for rising above circumstances, and she arrived in Paris in a state of physical and moral limpness which reduced Julia to the alternative of giving her time to recover herself, or going on without her. She would have preferred to do the latter, but prudence prevailed, and, fretting vainly at the delay, she drove to Meurice’s, so

heavy of heart, so weary of eye, that the fresh and sunny beauty of the lovely city, on one of the most brilliant mornings of an exceptionally fine spring, passed before her utterly unheeded, though seen for the first time.

Partly in rest, partly in writing to John Sandilands, Julia passed the interval before she could resume her journey. When she had finished her letter, she took it herself to the Bureau of the hotel, and while she was asking about the necessary postage-stamp, and the time of departure of the mail, a lady and gentleman, who had just alighted from a carriage at the entrance, passed through the hall towards a staircase on the right. The lady's face was turned away, but her tall slight figure seemed familiar to Julia, also the rich chestnut curls that clustered at the back of her neck, and showed brightly against the deep blue of her velvet dress. She had but a glimpse of them ; the next moment the lady had passed out of sight, and the gentleman coming back across the

hall approached the Bureau, and met Julia face to face.

The gentleman was Captain Dunstan. It gave her a strange shock and pain to recognise him; the recollection of him had never crossed her mind among all the thoughts which had occupied it since the news came.


"Miss Carmichael! You in Paris! This is an unexpected pleasure."

This hurriedly, while they shook hands, and he saw by her face that there was something wrong.

"Mrs. Dunstan will be delighted. Is your party staying here?"

Julia had not yet spoken an intelligible word. She now said she was merely passing through Paris on her way to Nice, to join her cousin, Mrs. Thornton. Perhaps Captain Dunstan had heard?

No; he had heard nothing. Had anything happened? There were several people near, and recollection had come to Julia in a full tide. She could not speak of her errand there; so she asked Captain



Dunstan to accompany her to Mrs. Thornton's rooms. Greatly wondering, he did so; and then Julia told him, with far more agitation than she had betrayed since the intelligence had reached Lady Rosa and herself. The mere passing of the knowledge on to another person who also knew Laura, seemed to break through her enforced composure.

But the tears with which she told the story of Robert Thornton's death, and her own errand, were quickly arrested by her astonishment at the effect of the communication upon Captain Dunstan. His quiet, rather languid manner had never given her the impression that he had much depth of feeling in him, or very profound capacity for sympathy. What was this which shook him now, which drove every tinge of colour from his face, and set his hands and lips trembling as a woman's hands and lips might tremble; which made him hardly able to utter the commonplace, "Very sorry, a dreadful event

indeed!” He stood for a few seconds after she told him, then sat down and hid his face in his hands, also as a woman might have hidden her face.

What could it mean, Julia asked herself, either that he should feel so much about this calamity, or that he should betray the feeling to her, between whom and himself there had been no confidence or particular friendship? But she could not answer her own question, or ask it of him; and presently he spoke again, in a vague kind of way, about her journey and her plans, asking when she would be in Paris again.

“I don’t know,” Julia answered. “I am quite ignorant as yet of my cousin’s intentions, except that she is expected at her house in London. I conclude she will return as soon as she is able to travel.”

“And she—Mrs. Thornton—is alone there?”

“But for her friends, yes. But, now that I think of it, I am surprised you

had not heard, for Mrs. Monro is with her, as well as Sir Wilfrid Esdaile."

"Esdaile! He there! How came he to be with them—with Mrs. Thornton?"

"Did you not know? I have not told you the story clearly. He was on board the yacht when it happened. It was he who sent the news to us. He had been a great deal with them of late."

"I have not heard of him for some time."

Again a spasm of pain seemed to seize him, changing all his features by its grip.

"I am sure he has been most kind. I don't know what would have become of my poor cousin if she had not had a friend."

"Ab," he interrupted her, "that will not bear talking of. And now, about yourself. You will not be starting for another hour, you will let Mrs. Dunstan be with you for that time. I have unfortunately an engagement which I must keep"—he was striving hard for compo-

sure, with little success, and Julia felt that he could see her wonder—“but I will send for her to come to you, or perhaps you would go to her. She has just come in; you will have some tea with her.”

“No,” said Julia, speaking on an impulse which in the time to come she remembered well; “I would really rather not, if you please. I don’t feel able to see her; I could not bear to make her so unhappy as she would be—for I know how she feels for others—at our first meeting. Pray don’t ask me to see her, Captain Dunstan; pray don’t trouble her by letting her know I am here. She does not know my cousin; she did not know the poor fellow who is gone; she will not be upset by hearing of it only in the ordinary course. I have no right to trouble and grieve her; and, indeed, it would distress me more, and make me less fit for my journey. Tell her afterwards, give her my love, and say to her that we shall meet in London. I am sure to be with my cousin there.”

“If you are quite sure you would rather not——”

“I am, indeed, quite sure. And pray say nothing to Mrs. Dunstan. She might be hurt; she might not understand, indeed, I could not see her. And I know you will excuse me if I ask you to leave me now; I have several things to attend to before I go.”


She held out her hand in farewell, and he took it in silence. When he had left the room Julia felt oppressed by the sense that there was a sort of secret which she understood but dimly, if at all, between herself and Captain Dunstan.

He went to the Bureau, wrote a line upon a card, and sent it to his wife, then went out across the busy Rue de Rivoli, all alive with the bustle and gaiety of Paris in the springtide, into the gardens of the Tuileries. He walked like a man in a hurry, like a man pursued, but it was not on account of the engagement of which he had spoken to Julia; for when he had

reached the river terrace, he went no farther, but walked up and down under the tender green canopy of the prim beautiful trees, heedless of the loiterers there, many of whom looked inquiringly at his handsome, weary face, with the bent brows and the frowning troubled eyes. There were many elements in that storm which was let loose in his heart—rage, pity, forbidden love, resentment against his fate—and their work was wild with him ; as all their voices gathered into one utterance, which drove and goaded him by its intolerable whisper, “ Too late ; too late !”

CHAPTER VII.

“What is it?”

HE spring was abroad in all its tender and hopeful beauty when Captain Dunstan and his wife came home to Bevis. The place that Janet loved so much wore at that season the aspect she loved best ; when the leaves upon the trees were just unfolding their pale tints, and there were breaks and vistas in the plantations not yet filled by the plentitude of the rich robes of the summer. The old English garden was very prolific of spring flowers, and the slender reed-like plants that have a dozen different names in the various English counties, where they are growing scarce, and the

beds of the lilies of the valley were crowded with the fairy bells and the dark close-wrapping leaves of the purest and sweetest of flowers. There was a pleasant stir of life and expectation about the place, and the house had a brisk air of preparation. Probably, if Captain Dunstan had not himself been little more than a stranger, his marriage with Miss Monro would not have been so well taken by his neighbours and his dependants ; but they all knew more about Janet than they knew about him, and public opinion was almost unanimous in her favour.

Mrs. Manners was in a condition of high importance and self-complacency. She did not approve of bachelor households ; being an exemplary person in her own sphere, she preferred having a lady of the house, who knew when things were properly done, and could appreciate the blessing of a thoroughly good housekeeper, with the active thankfulness by which such a boon ought to be acknowledged, and would not regard it merely with the taken-for-

granted air that occasionally tried her patience in the case of Captain Dunstan. Then, she knew the "ways" of the new lady of Bevis, and they were pleasant and considerate ways. To her household Janet would be welcome, and she was not one to hold such an assurance in light esteem.

There was something more than formal attention to orders in the preparations that were made for her, and many little fancies of hers, in the old times, were remembered and carried out in the arrangement of the rooms in the Admiral's corridor for her occupation ; a fact which Mrs. Manners pointed out with much complacency to Mrs. Cathcart and Miss Ainslie, who called at Bevis to ascertain when Captain and Mrs. Dunstan were expected to arrive.

"I never saw the place looking more beautiful," remarked Amabel, as the two ladies stepped out on the stone terrace from the library window ; "the very spirit of rest and peace seems to dwell upon it to-day."

They took their way to the vicarage through the park, talking of Janet, and speculating as to whether they should find her changed at all by her introduction to the world of which she had previously known nothing.

"One can never tell by letters," said Amabel, "unless they're the letters of somebody with a special talent for writing them, which Janet hasn't; but I cannot help thinking she is more bewildered than pleased by Paris. She will get on better next time she goes there."

"I fancy she will stay at home a good deal. Janet will not get into the fashionable ways, depend upon it."

"She will do whatever Captain Dunstan likes, and he will be bored at Bevis."

"Amabel, you don't like him. Why?"

"Yes, I do. I like him well enough, but I think of him now exactly as I have always thought of him, and I am afraid Janet will not find me half enthusiastic enough about her husband."

"Don't distress yourself, my dear," said

Mrs. Cathcart, drily, and with an air of matronly superiority which she occasionally assumed when she thought Amabel would be the better for a little snubbing ; “ Janet will not want anybody to be enthusiastic about her husband. Her own enthusiasm will suffice for her, and for him also.”

“ Oh, I daresay,” answered Amabel, quite indifferent to the snub ; “ but for all that I should not like her to know as well—as you do, for instance—that I think she is a million times too good for him, and a great deal too fond of him. How nice it is to think,” she added, with great animation and a sudden change of topic, “ that by this time to-morrow we shall have seen her, and in a few days we shall have settled down into the habit of seeing her, mistress of Bevis, and the happiest woman in the world.”

“ How delighted the old ladies at Bury House will be !”

“ Yes, won’t they ? And that reminds me to tell you a piece of news. Miss Carmichael

is coming to Bury House next week. Janet will be very glad of that. We shall be all—or nearly all—together again."

"Yes, with the exception of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and he will come down to Bevis before long, I daresay."

"He cannot, for some time, at all events, for he has gone out to Ceylon again."

"Indeed! When and where did you hear about him?"

"On Monday, when I drove over to Bury. I met that dear Miss Susan at the post-office, and did half an hour's shopping with her. You have no idea what friends we are! She told me all the news, and there is really a good deal of it, in addition to the strictly parochial intelligence with which Miss Susan is always supplied. Julia Carmichael is coming to Bury House; Sir Wilfrid Esdaile has gone to Ceylon; the plantation that Mr. Sandilands—the incomparable nephew of his incomparable aunts—is managing is doing so well that he is much better off, and the marriage

is likely to take place in the autumn."

"But not here, I suppose? Miss Carmichael would be married from her uncle's house, would she not?"

"I don't think so; nothing is settled yet, I fancy. I promised that I would go and see Julia very soon after her arrival, so I shall hear all about it then."

"It is very soon for her to be at Bury House again. I thought I understood from the dear old ladies that she was not allowed to make them more than one visit in the course of the year, and that this was one of their mild grievances."

"That was the case, but things are all changed, it seems, by the death of Mr. Thornton. You remember he was drowned somewhere in the Mediterranean; and his poor wife—Julia's pretty cousin, whom she used to talk about—came back to England. Julia went to her, and took care of her; she behaved very well indeed, Miss Susan Sandilands says; and then Mrs. Thornton went up to Scotland—to her husband's place, where his aunt lives,

I believe—and now Colonel and Lady Rosa Chumleigh are going to join her there, and so Julia got a little bit of extra leave, and is coming to Bury House."

"I remember she used to speak very highly of Mr. Thornton. It is a sad story."

"Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was on board Mr. Thornton's yacht when the accident happened, and he behaved with the greatest kindness to poor Mrs. Thornton; made every arrangement for her, and came back as far as Paris with her and Julia."

"I wonder whether he saw Janet there? She did not mention him at all in the two letters I have from her. But of course she did; he would be sure to see Captain Dunstan."

"I have no idea," said Amabel, who would have been glad to know that the friends had met. But she had little hope that they had; she believed herself too well acquainted, by force of sympathy, with Sir Wilfrid's feelings, to expect that he had "got over it" to the extent of being

able to see Janet just yet, in all the brightness of her bridal happiness.

"The sad story of poor Mr. Thornton," she added, "is an illustration of the saying about an ill wind, for her cousin's great trouble has had a good effect on Julia's prospects."

"Indeed ! How is that ?"

"I wish I could relate the matter to you as Miss Sandilands related it to me," and Amabel laughed at the recollection. "It was very funny to observe her anxiety to put everybody concerned in the best possible light, and to avoid censuring anyone, though it was quite plain that some blame must attach somewhere. I could not help thinking of Jane Bennet, in 'Pride and Prejudice,' when she hits on a happy combination by which it is just possible that Mr. Darcy and Wickham may both be right. Miss Susan's dilemma was this. If Julia was not wrong in keeping the fact of her engagement to Mr. Sandilands concealed from her uncle, because she was afraid of how Lady Rosa Chumleigh would

take it, Lady Rosa must be a rather despot and uncomfortable personage. But far be it from Miss Susan to admit any such evident alternative ; and you should have heard her amplifying and explaining, and all the time perfectly inaccessible to the consideration that it could not possibly matter to Lady Rosa Chumleigh what I thought about her temper, and her ‘ ways,’ with her family. It all came to this, that the engagement was divulged by Mrs. Thornton, who can do anything just now with her mother, and Lady Rosa took it very well indeed. Mrs Thornton, and the baby that is coming, and the fortune that depends on the baby, are of paramount importance. Julia may marry whom she pleases, and go to Bury House if she likes. That is the real meaning of it all. Here we are at the gate, and there is his reverence, reproachfully posted at the window looking for us, and, like Mrs. Gamp, ‘ droppin’ for his tea.’ ”


With her usual acuteness, Amabel, though she was acquainted with Julia

about anything—but he was a quick observer; and the brightness he had often noted of late in Janet's face, a lambent light of the countenance, which no one seeing her could have failed to remark, was certainly there no longer.

The arrangements made for her met with entire approval from Janet, and when she joined her husband in the library before dinner, and he politely hoped she had found all right, she tried very hard to answer as if there had been nothing wanting to this coming home. But he had not gone with her to the rooms that were so familiar and so strange; he had not looked or spoken as though he had the remotest comprehension of her feelings; this coming home might have been to him the taking up of his abode in an hotel, or in somebody else's house let furnished. He was perfectly kind; he was faultlessly polite; there was not the smallest objection to be taken to his manner towards his wife. But it was "manner." This was not the first, though it was the most sig-

nificant occasion on which Janet had felt that between him and herself there was an unacknowledged, incomprehensible barrier. What was it? She asked herself the question with remorseless iteration; she sought the reply in unrelenting self-examination; and resented its evasiveness by unceasing self-reproach. She might have found that reply easily enough, if she had only examined why it was that she could not put the question to himself; and, finding it, have exchanged the torment of doubt and misgiving for an entire relinquishment of hope. But she did not think of this; she had so little knowledge outside of her own experience to guide her, her single-heartedness was so complete, that she could not divine or dread any cause for the sure and certain blight that had fallen on her, except some fault, some shortcoming, some unfortunate error or deficiency of her own.

Did her husband find fault with her then? No; there had never been a word of dissension, of disagreement between



them. No hasty squabbles, no tiffs had come to break the decorous calm of their life together; and, if Dunstan had been called upon to name an instance in which Janet had given him the slightest offence or annoyance, he could not have done so. He would have protested, indeed, that she was incapable of anything which could be found fault with by the most fastidious. And he would have been profoundly amazed had he been told that she was not happy; for he behaved very well to her. He had not been false to the compact he had made with himself when he came to the resolution that the best thing he could do would be to marry Miss Monro; and Edward Dunstan had a keen sense of the respect and observance due to himself, necessary to the preservation of himself from self-reproach. The fates were indeed against him; the one woman whom he loved—for he never hesitated to say so to himself in his thoughts—he had twice lost, the first time by her marriage, the second by his own; but that was his own trouble,

his own deep, bitter, abiding trouble, which, after the fashion of a companion of the kind, not to be routed or shaken off, filled his life with profound *ennui*. His wife, however, had nothing to do with that—certainly nothing to suffer by it—and Dunstan was untroubled by any mis-giving of the excellence of his own conduct. Janet was a more silent person than he had imagined her to be, less easy to amuse ; she had not been so much delighted with all she saw in Paris as he expected ; on the whole, he fancied her intelligence had been a good deal overrated by her friends ; and there was a strange sort of timidity about her at times which he hoped she would get over, for it was decidedly bad form ; but she was very good, and—it was no fault of hers !

Dunstan felt quite magnanimous when he repeated this to himself, as he frequently did, persuading himself that he was honestly rallying against the consuming distaste for his life and its surroundings that had hung about him

ever since the passion of regret and reviling of fate into which his interview with Julia drove him had subsided, and under the full influence of which he had come back with his wife to Bevis.

Several times during their stay in Paris there had come over Janet an almost terrifying sense of loneliness and strangeness—one which she had tried to put away from her as we thrust back the phantoms that come to us in the sleepless dark. How should this be, when she had done with strangeness and loneliness for ever—when she was Edward's wife? It was only because she knew nothing of the world, he had lived in, only because she had so little acquaintance with the incidents of his past life, and the persons concerned in them, that now, when they were away from the only place with which she was familiar, they seemed to have no subjects of thought or conversation in common, and there was a distracting kind of newness in all their topics and surroundings. Perhaps it was also because she was so isolated an indi-

vidual; she had no family stories to tell; there was no taking on of fresh interests, no adding to the ties and charities of life, and her husband seemed to have no curiosity about her. She could not recall a question of his relative to the many things which, when two lives become united and merged for ever, might be supposed to be of interest. However that might be, Janet, true as steel to the lofty love and the stainless faith that were in her, the life of her life, put the intrusive feeling from her with all her might; he loved her, he had chosen her, she was his wife. Was there not the fulness of joy, of content, of blessedness, of companionship, of home in the fact? What right had she to admit a misgiving, to listen to a suggestion of want or incompleteness in her life? It would be treason to him, and utter ingratitude, if she did so, and she would not—no, she would not.

But steadfast and strong as was her will, there was something stronger still. It was that incomprehensible barrier which


existed between herself and her husband. She blamed herself, wildly and blindly. She felt at times as though it were something which she was striving to tear down with her hands, a prison wall closing upon her; the realization of the ghastly story of the woman who sat bound while the workmen reared the vault around her, and it rose, layer of stone by layer of stone, from her fettered feet to her shrinking eyes. And this when she had been his wife for but two short months, while the friends who loved her were thinking of her happiness in its first bloom of romance and wonder and beauty, and the external circumstances of her lot had not a flaw in all their harmonious order. What was it that came thus like a nightmare to sweet sleep, and spoiled it all? Janet was not merely learning the ordinary lesson of human experience, that the worship of a human being is idolatry, and that it involves the sure and certain penalty of that sin—a penalty which is generally speedy as well—though she worshipped her idol

with all the old fervour, with a poignancy of pain added, beyond analysis by her simple wisdom, which indeed was only feeling. No ; there was something more.

Never had that sense of loneliness and strangeness come so strongly to her as on this day, from which of all days it surely ought to have been banished. She was back again in the dear home of the past, and it was her own, the gift to her of the husband she loved ; it was to be the scene of their future, the sphere of all her duties, of all her joys, of such sorrows as might indeed be in store for her, but they were hidden for the present. She ought to be happy, she would be happy, she must be happy.

But Janet was only gay, and that by an effort which Dunstan, had he been thinking at all about her, could not have failed to perceive. She talked more than usual, and sang not quite so well, pleaded fatigue as an excuse for the failure of her voice, and left him early.

A note from Amabel Ainslie lay on



Janet's toilet-table, and she took it up eagerly ; almost as if in it she should find that true welcome home which somehow she had missed. It was an affectionate little missive, and it did Janet good. Strange that she should feel the need of it when all things seemed to be at their very best. Strange that when she stood gazing from the window of the old familiar room, over the familiar scene, serene and beautiful in the moonlight, that restless question which haunted her rose from her heart to her lips, and she said aloud : " What is it ? What is it ? "

CHAPTER VIII.

On the Stone Terrace.

GOOD deal of animation prevailed at Bevis after the arrival of Captain and Mrs. Dunstan, and the fine spring weather facilitated the visiting which was to be expected under the circumstances. Mrs. Drummond had lived in such retirement that many of Janet's neighbours had never made acquaintance with her in the old times, but saw her first as the lady of Bevis. She made a favourable impression upon all these persons; they pronounced her to be handsome and attractive, a little absent in manner, perhaps, and singularly quiet, which was not to be wondered at in the case of a girl

who had lived entirely with old people, and had not yet had time to get over the effect of that association, and to feel her own freedom and importance. Captain Dunstan was already popular, as, indeed, he deserved to be, for his tastes were sportsmanlike, his manners were good, his prejudices were few, and his political opinions were rather neutral-tinted. He might be said to possess almost every requisite for the winning of general favour, and to be free from the angles that either knock others, or are knocked against by others, in the case of the best-intentioned individuals.

On two points there was absolute uniformity of opinion. The first was Janet's dress. This was the subject of general commendation. Mrs. Dunstan displayed perfect taste in her attire, which was at once rich, simple, and becoming; and several ladies had contrived speedily to ascertain that she was not indebted for that result to the hateful services of a man-milliner. The second point was the

demeanour of the young couple. This was pronounced to be perfect; no nonsense about it, though theirs was well known to have been a love match, but the pleasantest attention to everybody, and just what there ought to be to each other.

That Bevis was not to be forsaken for London by its owners until late in the season, when they were to go to town for a few weeks, was also taken well by the neighbourhood. Janet had been over-tired in Paris, and, as Amabel had discerned, rather bewildered than pleased. It would, however, be more correct to say that she was at first pleased, and then bewildered; for the latter condition set in when the restless questions began to put themselves ceaselessly to her: What was it that had come between her husband and herself; what was it that had changed the glory of her noonday into twilight? Whence came this intangible, indescribable alteration which she felt in every nerve, with every heartbeat, from which she could no more turn her thoughts than she could keep her

eye from seeing the objects before, or her ears from hearing the sounds around them?

Thenceforth she had been beset by that kind of confusion which comes of trying to listen to two sounds at once, or rather of trying to hear the one, and to shut out the other, which will not be excluded. Then the splendours of art and the associations of history, the beauty of the fair city, the novelty of society and movement, all lost their attraction for her, and there stole over her and took possession of her great dread and weariness. She strove against them, she especially strove to conceal any of their symptoms from Dunstan; following out the programme of each day as he arranged it with unquestioning acquiescence, but losing day by day all interest in the scene around her, and gradually coming to have a great longing to be back again at Bevis, and a great shrinking from the idea of London.

When they should be at Bevis, among all the familiar objects, in the scene of their daily duties, she must surely come to

understand him better, and learn how to please him; she would be undisturbed there in that study. As if she ever ceased from it! So that, when Dunstan told her he did not care for going up to London until near the end of the season, she was perfectly well pleased, and would have given much to tell him that she should never wish for anything other—better there could not be—than to remain always at Bevis with him. She did not tell him so, however; she had never gotten into the way of saying out to him what there was of this kind in her heart; and that which had been strange and difficult before, the inexplicable something that inspired her questions soon rendered impossible.

There was coming to Janet, through the strange and secret source of her inexplicable suffering, a fault from which she had hitherto been singularly free—the fault of self-consciousness. A blight, not to be seen or felt save by herself alone, had fallen upon her; and she sought in herself for its origin until she became occupied with

herself to a degree which would have been impossible to the Janet of the past, the Janet whose heart, though irrevocably given away in the sense of a woman's abiding love, was free from self, and full of service, and her spirit chainless and lofty. A change was passing upon these qualities of her fine nature; the shadow of the eclipse of her faith and hope. She was constantly thinking about her own looks, her own dress, her own manners; the effect she produced, and the attitude of her husband's mind towards her.

Janet, who had been accustomed to the knowledge that her face was fair, just as she had been accustomed to the knowledge that twenty-four hours made the day and night, but to concern herself no more about the one fact than the other, took to thinking about her looks! She would often gaze wistfully into the glass, comparing the face that looked back at her to-day with that which she had seen yesterday, and dreading lest the answer to the haunting question might be

found in the reflection there. She was altogether wrong in that surmise; her husband still admired her quite as much as when her beauty had first taken him by surprise; more, indeed, perhaps, now that it was fittingly adorned with rich attire. Only he did not think about her fair face when he was looking at it, any more than he thought about the familiar objects which beautified the scene of his daily life.

Janet, who had never given a thought to her personal adornment beyond that intuitive regard to neatness and appropriateness which is inseparable from the habits of a gentlewoman, took to thinking about clothes. She studied the dress of other women, she observed the vagaries of fashion, she wondered whether it could be that she offended her husband's fastidious taste by making unconscious blunders in an art of which she was so ignorant. She was again altogether wrong in that surmise; she had good taste in dress, and Dunstan recognised it. Only he did not think about her dress when he saw it, and

when she again wore a gown or a jewel because he had chanced to notice it, he did not see that she was wearing the gown or the jewel.

Janet, to whom a serene unembarrassed bearing, as free from affectation as it was free from boldness, was as natural as breathing, began to think about her manners ! Had something awkward in her, something unlike the ways and the tone of the "world" in which he had always lived, something which betrayed her want of skill and custom, and had not been apparent in the quiet life from which he had taken her, annoyed her husband, chilled and humiliated him, against his will, perhaps hardly with his knowledge ? Janet had read of such things, such dreadful things, in novels, limited as her acquaintance with fiction was ; and in her secret soul she regarded herself, in comparison with Dunstan, as "the beggar maid" in comparison with the king who married her ; for, on the side on which Janet was humble, her humility was thorough.

There was a side on which she was proud, with a thoroughness of pride in which there might be terrible power for evil; but she knew nothing of that in herself when she took to studying herself, and, among other baseless fancies, pondered that one, whether her manners were not unconsciously provincial and distressing to Dunstan. And, again, in that surmise she was altogether wrong. Her frankness, her gentleness, and her quick intelligence were all blended and expressed in Janet's "ways," and her husband had never found a fault with her, although she was undeniably a distinct personage; although—

The fashion of her gracefulness was not a followed rule.

It would have ceased to be gracefulness had she been able to make up her mind which was the "style" most likely to be admired by Dunstan among the varieties which her sojourn in Paris enabled her to observe, and had set about imitating it. He might have noticed such an imitation, but, also, he might not; for

he did not notice her "ways," he had not observed that she had gained confidence by her intercourse with the world, without losing in sweetness and simplicity; he marked no change in her. He did not love her; she did not strongly interest him. He knew she was handsome and good; he would always behave well to her, and take care she should have everything she wanted; she was all he could wish for as a wife, except the only woman he did wish for; that, however, was not her fault, nor his, but the fault of Fate; and sometimes he did not mind it very much, while at others he wished he was dead.

To the outer world not the smallest indication of the state of feeling of either the one or the other was given; the surface of these two lives was smooth and sunny. And, as for the question that haunted Janet, what was it but "a sentimental grievance" after all, and we know that a sentimental grievance, though it may divide nation against nation for suc-

cessive centuries, and condemn races to comparative poverty and obscurity, is not worthy of consideration by hard-headed and practical people.

To the two persons who really knew her well, and whose interest in her went far beyond that of the people who saw everything at Bevis in the rosiest of rose-colour—to Mrs. Cathcart and Amabel Ainslie—there was something not quite satisfactory about Janet's looks and ways. The Vicar's impression was confirmed by the observation of his wife; the expression of Janet's countenance was changed; and she looked, now absent and again anxious, as she had never looked in the old time. Very likely it was the responsibility of her new position, Mrs. Cathcart thought, knowing that Janet was not one to take anything of the kind lightly, and feeling that she herself should genuinely hate a big place and a large establishment; but, whatever might be the cause of it, the alteration was there, unmistakable by anybody who knew Janet so well as she did. But that Janet's rela-

tions with her husband were anything but perfect, never occurred to Mrs. Cathcart. It could not, indeed, have occurred to anyone, for Captain Dunstan's demeanour to his wife was just the same as it had been during their brief engagement, and who was to guess that they had so little to say when they were left to themselves?

Mrs. Cathcart was quite vexed with Janet's calm and indifferent way of answering her questions about Paris; she hoped it could not be possible that Janet was getting a little spoilt, and inclined to what she might suppose to be the fine-ladyism of indifference to scenes and objects which must have been surprising and delightful to her inexperience. But even her apathy in regard to the wonders and delights of Paris did not strike Mrs. Cathcart so unpleasantly as her absent-mindedness when things of nearer interest and import were in question; she actually seemed like a person trying to listen to two speakers at once when the Vicar was telling

her about the new arrangements for the choir-practising, and the Vicar's wife had the properest sense of the laches involved in any inattention to the Vicar.

Amabel Ainslie had seen the change in Janet as quickly as Mrs. Cathcart saw it, but she viewed it differently, and thought over it with a strange feeling of apprehension. Janet had not said one word to her of anything but content, and Amabel felt certain that she never would; but she had been vague with her also, and Amabel unhesitatingly assured herself that Janet was not happy.


"It is his fault," she said to herself; "it is his fault. I cannot guess, and I shall never know from her, but there is something wrong. No one but he could make her unhappy, now that she is his wife; her worship of him has that in it that no one else in the world can do her real good or harm. It is he! But what can it be? I cannot but guess and wonder. He seems, he is, so nice—a little too perfectly polite for my fancy, but then that is a

matter of fancy, and very few people would agree with me—but he does not know much about her tastes and ideas, that is pretty plain. He looked so strange when I asked him what he thought of her songs—I don't believe he knew she ever composed one! Ah! Janet, Janet, I hope you have not married the wrong man."

On the joyful occasion of the visit of the old ladies from Bury House to Bevis, where they arrived in the smartest carriage that Mr. Jones of the "Bell Inn" could turn out, Janet felt more nearly happy than she had been for some time. For it had come to that; she had to persuade herself that she was happy; she had to silence the haunting voice by a strong effort of her will. What had become of the golden radiance which had shone all around her?—where was the dream-world of bliss? The radiance had faded, the dream-world had vanished, quite noiselessly, with no shock, no threat, but only the lightless void remained after the

one, the chill of awakening after the other.

On that day, however, it was almost as if the former glow, the old vision, were there again, for Janet could not but see that her husband was thoroughly pleased, and that he exerted himself to please. How kind, courteous, and attentive he was to the Misses Sandilands; how ready to echo all their delighted comments on Janet's good looks; how quick to prevent her being embarrassed by their eager and unsuspecting inquiries respecting Sir Wilfrid Esdaile; how ready to assist her in showing them the house and gardens; how kindly interested in all they had to tell of their nephew and his prospects! After all, this could only be for her, only a proof of his love for her, leading him to be careful for those who had befriended her. She would try to remember this, to hold it in her mind when the spectre rose and the voice haunted; to remember, above all, that he had chosen her; she, who had not an advantage of any kind to tempt him



any motive except love. No, she must be mistaken ; some dreadful temptation was at work within her.

Thus Janet pleaded her own cause with her own self, while the old ladies were walking, in wondering admiration, through the long line of succession-houses, or surveying the beautiful prospect from the terrace, or giving Mrs. Manners infinite credit for the preservation in which the venerable furniture was kept, or admiring the fitting-up of Janet's rooms. The piano and the books which were Mrs. Drummond's gift had been sent back to Bevis from Bury House, and now occupied their former places. Wider experience and more fastidious taste than those of the old ladies might have pronounced Janet's home beautiful, and all that could be desired.

"You will let Julia come to us soon, will you not?" Janet asked Miss Susan, when the visit was drawing to a close. "You know she disappointed me before, and she must make it up to me now."

“As soon as you like, my dear Janet,” was Miss Susan’s reply. “We shall be glad that she should have so great a pleasure; and, indeed, she must want some pleasant society, some happy faces to raise her spirits, after the painful scenes she has gone through.”

“True. I have not heard particulars, but it must have been very trying for Julia.”

“Of course you have not heard particulars, my dear; I should have been much surprised had Julia distressed you by telling you all that sad story, at a time when, if there ever can be such a time in the life of human beings liable to death and sorrow, the remembrance of them ought to be put away. And I am not going to talk to you about it now, or to let you think about it.”

“She was very young, and very happy,” said Janet, not heeding Miss Susan’s protest, “and it all came to an end in a moment. How dreadful!”

“Not all, my dear. We must not say

all. It is a terrible bereavement, but poor Mrs. Thornton has many blessings left."

"Blessings! and her husband gone! What can be blessings to her without him?"

"Parents and friends," said Miss Susan, seriously; "health, youth, fortune; and then, you know, or perhaps you may not have heard, she has her child to look forward to—a great consolation, and a tie to life, however great her trouble."

"Do you think so?" said Janet, but absently, almost as if she were talking to herself. "I cannot imagine there being any consolation for such a loss; I cannot believe that there could be any tie to life when that one is broken which must be all or nothing."

With a look of great tenderness in her sweet old face, Miss Susan laid her shrivelled palm on Janet's soft white hand, as she said in a low voice:


"It is just like you to feel like that; but you are only a wife as yet, my dear."

Captain Dunstan had been talking to the elder sister while these sentences were exchanged between Janet and Miss Susan, but Janet, raising her eyes as the last was spoken, saw in his face a look of strange distress and disturbance which set her heart beating fast and heavily, with the vague dread that she had displeased him. The look passed in a moment, but it had stayed long enough to overcast all the calm and gladness she had been feeling. Presently the old ladies drove away in state, perfectly happy, and much delighted with their visit; and Janet and her husband, who had accompanied them to the carriage, returned into the house. She was making up her mind to ask him how she had offended him, whether it was the sentiment she had expressed, or the fact of her uttering it—a fault, it might be, in the world's code of manners—which had disturbed him, when he took up his hat and said to her with the utmost ease, as if nothing whatever had occurred to trouble him :

"I have to speak to the Vicar on some business, and I shall just catch him if I go now."

The spectre rose more plainly than ever before Janet, the haunting voice pressed its question with more intolerable iteration. What was it in her that was parting them, and was he resolved that she should not ask him? But Janet had not offended Dunstan; he had paid no heed to what she said; the disturbance in his face had been caused by no words of hers; and now, as he walked in the direction of the Vicarage, but not with any purpose of seeing the Vicar, he was not thinking of her at all. He had spoken with even unusual gentleness, just because he was not, just because she did not matter to him; just because, when he too was beset with a spectre, and when a haunting voice most pertinaciously whispered, "Too late!" he made a scrupulous point, in the futile honourableness of his uninstructed conscience, of repeating to himself: "It is no fault of hers."

On the day after Julia Carmichael's arrival at Bevis on her promised visit, she and Janet went to the Vicarage; but Janet only remained with Mrs. Cathcart, Julia returning to the house to write her letters. That day Janet was indisputably not looking well, and she did not deny that she had been feeling ill. "At least, not exactly ill, but strange," she explained; "what Edward calls 'moped,' and therefore I am especially glad Julia has come; she is so pleasant and amusing." Mrs. Cathcart had an afternoon engagement which made it impossible for her to walk home with Janet, and she took leave of her at the little gate in the park wall, of which each possessed a key. Mrs. Cathcart lingered for a few minutes on her own side of the gate, watching the tall slender figure moving onward under the branches of the great elms, and noting, as she had often noted before, its grace and steadiness. When she had reached a point in the avenue which they called the "dip," Janet turned, waved her handkerchief in fare-



well, and disappeared. Mrs. Cathcart returned to the house, thinking that she wished Janet were quite well, and not "moped," that she hoped that nice Julia would do her good, and that it would be a great pity if delicate health should come to mar the perfection of the arrangement for which Mrs. Drummond had so dexterously schemed by securing the residence of her heir at his estate for those three important months. And then she dropped that thread of thought, never to resume it in all her life again.

Janet walked on under the branches of the great elms, more and more slowly as she neared the upper end of the stately avenue where the shrubberies commenced, by passing through a portion of which she could gain a small flight of steps leading to the stone terrace. This was the shortest way to the house, and she was glad it was not longer, for there was a strange distressing sense of exhaustion over her, and her sight was dim. Once or twice her steps grew uncertain, and she felt as she


so well remembered to have felt that day, in the grounds at The Chantry, when Sir Wilfrid Esdaile told her the story it so much grieved her to hear. She got through the shrubbery, hardly conscious of her movements, ascended the little flight of steps, and found herself on the terrace, within a few yards of the windows of the library, which were open. A garden-bench was set against the wall of the house close beside the window nearest to her; in front of it paced Argus, the peacock, "high and disposedly." She saw a flash of colour as the beautiful tame bird's tail swept her dress, then saw no more, put her hand out, caught hold of the bench, and sank down upon it, quite senseless.

When Janet recovered consciousness, and the first utter vagueness after a swoon passed off, to be succeeded by the absolute weakness that holds the whole body fettered, she remained half sitting, half lying, but motionless. She could not speak, she could not lift her head or raise her eyelids. One arm hung over the rail

of the bench, and so kept her balanced ; she tried to move the other, but she could not. Presently the sound of voices came to her ears, voices distinct, and close to her. Two persons who must have been within two or three feet of her, and just inside the window-sill, were talking in earnest tones. They were Julia and Dunstan ; and Janet, motionless, speechless, spellbound, heard every word they said.

CHAPTER IX.

A Statement by Julia Carmichael.

“HE following is an exact statement of the circumstances that occurred during my stay at Bevis. I set them down here in the order in which they took place. It is a relief to my mind to recapitulate them thus carefully for John's reading, as in doing so I shall be able to reduce my responsibility, in a matter which is of pressing and painful importance to me and others, to its true proportions, instead of being, as I sometimes am, oppressed by a terrible misgiving that it was all my fault.

“I arrived at Bury House at the begin-

ning of the second week in May, and a week later I went, at the invitation of Mrs. Dunstan, to Bevis. I looked forward with great pleasure to this visit; and previous circumstances had invested the occasion with an interest which led me to regard Janet with close observation. She received me with the utmost kindness, and, during the short time that we were together on the first day, I did not notice any symptoms of ill-health or unhappiness about her. It was late in the afternoon when I arrived at Bevis; there was not much time before dinner; some people dined there that day, and it was not until the following morning at breakfast that I was struck with a change in her appearance. She was looking very handsome, I thought, but far from well, and something dispirited and restrained about her manner impressed me painfully. I learned from something which was said at breakfast that Captain Dunstan was going out to dinner on that day. It was arranged that Janet and I should walk down to the Vicarage after

luncheon. When Captain Dunstan had left us I asked her whether she was feeling well, and she said not quite, but a walk would do her good. She then proposed to show me the house and gardens.

“I ought to record in this place that there was not either in her demeanour or in that of Captain Dunstan the slightest trace of any disagreement or disunion between them. She was gentle and sweet, as she always was, but there was a decided change in her, and I could not help wondering whether he was aware of it. I dwell on my perception of this change, because I was led by it into saying what I did afterwards say to him. The house interested me very much, and Janet told me all about the former disposition of it, in Mrs. Drummond’s time. She was cheerful, but not elated and talkative as I should have expected her to be, and she said very little respecting herself or her own feelings. She left me to attend to some matters connected with her intended call at the Vicarage, and after luncheon, at which

Captain Dunstan was present, Janet and I set out together for the Vicarage. Before leaving the dining-room I had chanced to say that I must write some letters before post-hour, and Captain Dunstan invited me to use the library for that purpose, adding that I need not mind about post-hour, as he was going to Bury, and would take my letters.

“ We took the private way through the park, along the avenue of elms, and Janet talked a good deal, not of herself or her position, but of my prospects, and a little of my cousin, Mrs. Thornton. Although Laura had been a frequent subject of conversation between us formerly, I would not have spoken of her now, had not Janet done so, because I concluded that Captain Dunstan had told his wife of the circumstances in the past connected with himself and Laura, and that it was just possible she might feel some reluctance or awkwardness about the mention of her. However, Janet introduced the subject, and after a little I perceived, to

my great embarrassment and regret, that she was not aware that her husband and Mrs. Thornton were even acquainted. This seemed to me unaccountable, but an instant's reflection showed me that, whatever his reason might be, it was not my business to reveal to his wife what Captain Dunstan had concealed from her, and therefore I said nothing on the point. Janet questioned me closely about Laura, and spoke with her usual feeling and sympathy of Mr. Thornton's death.

"Mrs. Cathcart was expecting us; nothing particular happened while I remained, but that was for a short time only. I left Janet with Mrs. Cathcart, and returned alone to the house by the same way. I went at once to the library, and began to write my letters. The weather was very fine, and the French windows, giving like doors upon the terrace, were open. A table was set ready for my use close to one of the windows, and I had been writing for more than an hour, when Captain Dunstan crossed the

terrace from the garden side, and asked me whether he might come in for a few minutes' talk with me. I was a little surprised, but I said, Yes, I had written all my letters, and they were ready for him.

“I could not tell how it was that he began to speak of Laura. I had almost made up my mind, if the opportunity offered, to say something to him about the awkwardness to myself of Mrs. Dunstan's not knowing that he and my cousin were acquainted ; still, when he introduced the subject abruptly, I was completely taken aback. I impute to my being confused, and to his perceiving it, the unfortunate conversation that ensued, for I have no doubt his first intention was merely to question me about the sad event which had taken place at Nice, and that he was not aware I had any reason to believe him to be, or rather to have been, especially interested in Laura. He looked so strangely at me that I had to attempt to explain the confusion into which a very

natural-seeming question had thrown me, and I said something to the effect that it would have been better if this subject had been openly talked of before Mrs. Dunstan.

“I have no apology to offer, either on his part or my own, for the revelation that followed; my business is to narrate, not to excuse it. Perhaps it would not have been excusable under any circumstances—perhaps its peculiar gravity was lent to it by the event; at least, it was not unnatural—at all events, it was inevitable; and, for the fault of it, he and I are both suffering, and also another, who had no part in that fault.

“What I learned from Captain Dunstan was, then, that he had never ceased to love my cousin Laura. Plainly stated, there is the truth; but it is indispensable for me to record here that he acknowledged it with vehement emotion, the result of the revulsion against self-restraint, of the yielding to the strong temptation of my presence. I had but lately left her, he said, and it was so long since he had heard

of her. I had never seen Captain Dunstan under the influence of any strong feeling before, and I was excessively surprised and shocked. He found that I was aware that he had seen Laura once since her marriage, and he protested that he had tried hard to forgive her treachery to him, and even to forget her since then. He recapitulated all the circumstances of their brief love-story, telling me much that I had not previously known, and dwelling emphatically upon the hardness of his destiny in having the fatal decision of Admiral Drummond against him reversed too late. He then referred to my meeting with him in Paris, on my way to Nice, and spoke of his feelings in a manner which distressed me very much, dwelling upon the pursuing destiny that had divided him from Laura. Here it becomes necessary that I should repeat the words which were said as exactly as I can.

“‘You little know what you told me then, that I had again lost her, or, at least, had lost the chance I might have had. It

was hard, was it not? The first time she would not wait for me; the second time I had not waited for her!

“‘Hush! hush! For heaven’s sake think of what you are saying! Why do you say such things to me, to yourself?’

“‘I don’t know; I can’t tell; something stronger than myself makes me do it. You say she has never once spoken of me all this time—never mentioned me. Does she think I do not care for her sorrow?’

“‘Indeed she does not, believe me, but she remembers nobody, thinks of nothing except the loss she has sustained.’

“‘I suppose so; no doubt you are right. And so it ought to be. Living and dead, Thornton is the winner.’

“‘What a dreadful state of mind you have let yourself fall into!’ And then I added, by an irresistible, miserable impulse, ‘What, in heaven’s name, induced you to marry poor Janet?’

“‘Ah! what?’ Captain Dunstan moved from the place where he had been standing, and, leaning against the window-jamb,

spoke very distinctly. 'You think I was very wrong to marry her?'

" 'I think you were very cruel and false to her, and very foolish. You did not love her; you knew she loved you. Did you marry her for the sake of pity?'

" 'No, Miss Carmichael, I married her for the sake of gratitude.'

" 'Gratitude!'

" 'Yes. What has driven me to speak thus to you I don't know; but as I have done so, I will be thorough; I will tell you all about it. There's nothing to come of telling you, there's nothing to hope for from that, or from anything; but I will tell you all the same. You are right; I *did* know that Janet loved me; I had it from the very best authority; and I owed to her Bevis and all it meant. It was no fault of hers that the good was taken out of it; and her love for me enabled me to make her the only possible return. If Laura had waited for me I should have never known that I had incurred a debt of gratitude to Janet, which I could not in-

deed pay, when I did become aware of it, in love, but which shall be faithfully discharged, so help me God! It was she who, by refusing the inheritance herself, made me master of Bevis, and, though I had no heart to give her, I could restore her to her home, secure her position in the world, and make her happy. That Mrs. Drummond wished me to marry Janet, I knew from Mrs. Drummond herself, and it has turned out very well. Janet, who deserves to be happy, for she is very good, is happy as my wife, and I—I am—Well, we need not mind about that. I must say again that I have not the remotest idea of what has made me say all this to you. I have, of course, been wishing to hear the particulars which you have told me, and intending to ask you for them, but I never contemplated the possibility of betraying myself in this way, and I suppose it will not be easy for you to forgive me for having done so.'

“ ‘That is nothing. What it is not easy to forgive is what you have done to her.

Oh, Captain Dunstan, how could you be so cruel or so stupid? What is the estate you owe to her, as you tell me, in comparison with the heart she has given you to be broken?

“ ‘Broken? And why? You don’t take me, I hope, for the sort of person who could visit his own disappointment on a woman who is not only blameless, but everything that is excellent—too faultless, indeed? I daresay you hate me, Miss Carmichael, but you need not despise me unnecessarily. Janet is quite safe with me, I assure you. Your own observation might tell you that. I do not think she has an ungratified wish, an unconsulted taste; if she has, it is her own fault, certainly not mine.’

“ ‘You are trying to justify what cannot be justified. You have taken the pure gold of a perfect love and trust from her, and given her false coin in exchange.’

“ ‘You are talking—I suppose I must not say nonsense, for politeness’ sake—

but, at all events, like a romantic girl. Janet will never be unhappy, I hope; she never shall be, if I can prevent it; and I daresay, if Thornton had not died, I should not have regretted my marriage for my own sake; but I never thought of such a thing happening as that, and it completely upset me. What I now have to do is my very best, so that I shall never have to regret it for Janet's sake.'

"I need not repeat what I answered to this; it did not affect events; I need only set down that I said what was in my heart, in very strong and earnest words; urging upon him that the only hope, the only chance of safety for Janet's peace and their joint future was, not only the successful concealment of the passion which he guiltily cherished in his heart, but its eradication. I don't know what I said, where the words came from to me; I was all the time a prey to bewildering distress and pity, and to a dim vague fear. Captain Dunstan listened to me very patiently, becoming calm and like himself again while I

was speaking; and when I paused he said, in his usual tone—


“ ‘If I make no answer to all you say, it is not because I disregard it; it is because I am a man, and you are a woman, and you don’t understand. We must never speak of this again; it must be like a dream to both of us. Let me only say that I count upon your friendship for Janet, and that, however mad and foolish my conduct of to-day may lead you to believe me, you need have no fear for her.’

“He took up my letters, and left the room by the door which opened into the entrance-hall, leaving me overwhelmed with distress and perplexity. I sat there I don’t know how long, hardly able to bring my thoughts into any sort of arrangement, and chiefly conscious of the wish to get away from Bevis as soon as possible. With what pleasure I had come thither, as a complete breaking away from and contrast to the scenes through which I had recently passed, and how strange a connection had established itself between

them ! It would be impossible for me to remain ; I could not hold so anomalous a position ; besides, when the strange mood that had prompted Captain Dunstan's unsought and unwelcome confidence should have passed away, I, of all persons in the world, would be the least pleasing in his sight. It was impossible that he should ever feel at ease with me again. I must devise some excuse for going away, which should excite no suspicion in Janet's mind, though, indeed, how should any suspicion come to it ?

“ Time passed ; the evening drew on. I heard the sound of carriage wheels, and concluded that Captain Dunstan was gone. Still Janet did not come to look for me in the library, and I remained there, glad of every minute's delay before I must see her sweet, unconscious face again—remained after the room had been lighted, and until it was time to dress for dinner, and still Janet did not come to look for me.

“ At length I went upstairs, and passing by the end of the Admiral's corridor, on



my way to my own room, I observed Janet's maid stooping down and apparently listening at the door of her mistress's room. She perceived me, and said,

“ ‘The door is locked, and Mrs. Dunstan does not speak. I have knocked several times. I am afraid she is ill.’

“ ‘Mrs. Dunstan has not come in,’ I answered. ‘I left her at the Vicarage.’

“ Janet had certainly come in, however; the door was locked on the inside, and also that of the dressing-room which communicated with Janet's own sitting-room, and in the latter we found the hat, gloves, and shawl she had worn that afternoon. We rattled the handle of the door, and called to her several times without effect; but, just as I was becoming seriously alarmed, the key turned, and Janet opened the door, supporting herself by it, though, and showing us a face so ghastly that her maid uttered an exclamation. She was wrapped in a white dressing-gown, and her hair was loose; her eyes were dim and contracted, her face was ashy

pale, except for one burning red spot upon each cheek-bone ; her lips were livid, and she was shivering. I shall never forget the white figure in the doorway, against the dimness behind her, facing the lights of the bright, pretty sitting-room.

“ ‘Janet, what is the matter? Are you ill?’

“ ‘I am afraid I am. I have been lying down.’

“She spoke each word faintly, with a pause between it and the next, and in a voice quite unlike her own. Those were the last coherent words she addressed to anyone for many days to come. Dr. Andrews was in the house when Captain Dunstan came home late that night, and she was then quiet, but it was the first of many nights of watching and anxiety, during which her mind and her speech were not occupied with actual things, or with us who were about her, at all.

“Dr. Andrews was of opinion that the illness had not come so suddenly as it had seemed to come ; and Mrs. Cathcart told us

that she had not thought Janet looking well when she was at the Vicarage in the afternoon. In answer to the doctor's minute inquiries, no one could tell him anything of the interval between Janet's leaving Mrs. Cathcart—which I found she had done earlier than I supposed—and the moment at which I and her maid ascertained the fact of her illness; no one had seen her come into the house, and Captain Dunstan, concluding that she was with me in the library, and being rather late for his dinner engagement, had not looked for her before he went out.

“On the dreary days which followed I need not dwell. They had this effect on me, personally, that they removed every shade of embarrassment from between myself and Captain Dunstan. There were times when I hardly recalled what had passed, so intently was my mind set upon the hand to hand, foot to foot, inch by inch fight in which she and we were engaged with that insidious and terrible foe which had stricken her. I pass on to the

time when she began to recover. Then, her mind being 'clear, though weak and passive, as it seemed to me, I especially observed two things; the first, that she was sensibly distressed by Captain Dunstan's presence; the second, that she was better, more restful, and more refreshed when Amabel Ainslie was with her. She would smile faintly when her husband entered the room, and answer his inquiries gently, but she never asked him a question, and she never inquired for him in his absence.

"To me she was always gentle, and painfully grateful, but she would lie, or sit, for hours, holding Amabel's hand with her own eggshell-like fingers, speaking little, but listening to her friend's pleasant talk. Amabel read aloud to her occasionally, but I do not think Janet listened; she would keep her eyes closed all the time. She was at her best when Amabel could be with her. The first wish of any kind that she expressed was that Captain Dunstan should go to London as he had proposed to do;

and this she conveyed through Amabel. He went up to town, it being then late in June, and Janet was regaining strength. I could not but observe that she was exceedingly nervous when he was going away, and that, either by accident, or by her own contrivance, they were not alone for a moment. No allusion had been made by Captain Dunstan or myself to the events of the day on which Janet's illness commenced, and I now bade him farewell for an indefinite time, as I was to return to Hunsford the following week.

"From the hour of her husband's departure I observed a singular alteration in Janet. Her nervousness subsided, her absent manner changed, she improved in strength daily; but a settled sadness took possession of her.

"On the day before that on which I was to leave Bevis two letters arrived; one was for me, the other was for Janet. The first announced, in Laura's own hand, the birth of Laura's son. A joyful and a sorrowful mother was my cousin, and the

few lines, in which I read both joy and sorrow, touched me very nearly. The second announced, in a hand which Janet did not know, the death of her sister-in-law, Mrs. Monro, at Nice. I was afraid of the effect that the intelligence might have upon Janet, but she took it very quietly. Amabel was with her for part of that day, and I heard Janet say to her :

“ ‘There is not now anyone of kin to me in the whole world.’

“She talked to me more than usual, on the day before I was to leave her, of my future, and of John, never of herself, and she made no mention of her husband. The oppressive consciousness that had revived in my own mind, when the pressure of anxiety about her life and health was removed, prevented me from naming him. We bade each other an affectionate adieu, and I saw Janet last standing at the top of the great avenue in her deep mourning dress. She waved her hand to me, while I leaned from the carriage-window for a parting look.

“The remainder of what I have to set down here is but hearsay, therefore shall be brief.

“Two days after I left Bevis, Janet drove into Bury, and drew out of the bank the whole of the money standing in her name there. On the third she told her maid that she was going to London, and would not require her to go with her, but would send her instructions afterwards. She then left Bevis, taking only a travelling-bag, and was driven to the post-office, where she got out of the carriage, and put a letter into the box with her own hand, thence to the railway-station, where she arrived only just in time to take her place in the train.

“No instructions reached Janet’s maid, no communication of any kind was made by Mrs. Dunstan to her household ; and when, after several days had elapsed, Mrs. Manners wrote to Captain Dunstan, expressing the surprise and uneasiness which the silence of Mrs. Dunstan was occasion-

ing at Bevis, her respectful remonstrance received a startling reply.

“As soon as it was possible for him to reach Bevis after the receipt of the house-keeper’s letter, Captain Dunstan arrived there, and it very shortly became known to the household that Mrs. Dunstan had not joined her husband in London. Nothing more became known to them, except, indeed, that their mistress had incurred no blame of that kind which involves disgrace, by what she had done. ‘Something between them that nobody knows anything about,’ was the general supposition; ‘but he respects her as much as ever, and if she never comes back it will be her fault, and not his.’

“In the centre compartment of the old bureau in Janet’s dressing-room, where she habitually kept her keys, and which was unlocked, there was found a small parcel, addressed to Captain Dunstan. It contained a bracelet of gold set with cats’ eyes, and a letter. Of the

contents of that letter only a few lines were ever made known to anyone except Captain Dunstan himself, and with them only I am concerned here. The writer said that she was aware, if search were made for her, there would be little hope that she could elude it, being so unequally matched against the resources of such search ; but she earnestly begged that none should be instituted. She asked this as the one only compensation that could be made to her. When freedom should have been restored to Captain Dunstan by her death, he would be apprised of it ; she would take order for that. For the interval and for the rest she implored peace.

“ Captain Dunstan, whose distress and remorse were extreme, left no means untried to discover Janet, despite her prayer ; but she had had too much the start of inquiry, and all was unavailing. From no quarter could he obtain intelligence of her ; the only friends she had, the old ladies at Bury House, were horror-stricken and absolutely

ignorant ; her only relative had died among strangers in a strange land.

“ These are the facts that I have tried to record ; of the feelings they have given rise to it would be equally vain and impossible for me to say anything.”

CHAPTER X.

All, or Nothing.

WOUNDED, she had fled! The instinct of the stricken creature who would fain hide from the herd was strong in Janet, and fostered by all the associations of her past, fed by the qualities and the defects of her character. Many a woman not nearly so good as she, not so lofty, not so single-minded, would have better borne such a blow, would have seen the fair structure of her faith, her hope, her trust, and her happiness levelled to the earth by one fell stroke, and have turned her, after the first shock of the devastation, to the building up, out of the shattered fragments, of some sort of shelter for her forlorn head. Many a woman not so


good as she, not so lofty, not so single-minded, would have applied the test of duty and likewise the standard of expediency to the position, and, with whatever suffering, made up her mind to her fate. With Janet, however, no such thing could be. It would be impossible for any words to convey what she suffered in the interval between the laying, by Dunstan's words, of the haunting question that had pursued her since a very little while after her marriage, in the deep grave of a dreadful certainty, and the merciful dropping of the veil of illness between her and external things. The agony of a score of deaths was in that uprooting of all the foundations of her life, in the fear and loneliness of a lost heart, cast out from the fire and food of love, to cold which shall not abate its rigour, and hunger which shall not cease to gnaw for evermore.

Her first coherent thought, when the numbness that had held her bound while the "lep'rous distilment" was poured into her ear gave way, and she could move,

was that she must get away at once ; and while she lay upon the floor of her room, her face downwards on her hands, and when she dragged herself to the door, with a horror of confronting Julia in which there was the beginning of frenzy, her brain seemed to be turned into an anvil on which a hammer was beating, and the echo of every stroke said, " How ? how ? " When she emerged from the stupor of illness, it was with a perfectly clear recollection of all that had occurred, and it was to resume in undiminished weight the load that had been lifted from off her for the interval during which life and death were contending for the possession of her. She experienced then that sense which at one time or another comes to most of us, the sense of a dual existence in which there is no relation between the condition of the body and that of the mind. There she lay, calm and quiet, a model patient for quiescent answering to " treatment," gaining a little in convalescence each day, and all the time ruin and desolation were in her heart,

and in her mind was a fixed purpose, at utter variance with all that surrounded her. She used to feel glad in those days that she was so weak; she could have suffered more had she been stronger, but, as it was, she had many an interval of vagueness, in which the tired mind rested, many a doze of the thoughts, and, though their wide-awake complexion never changed, there was relief in the sense of something deferred which came to her with those lapses.

Then, too, she was so closely watched, the tending of her was so faithful, that she was bound to absolute self-control, and that was very well for her. Had anything been evident in her which was not readily to be accounted for by her illness, she would straightway have been questioned by Julia, or by Mrs. Cathcart, or perhaps, if mention had been made of it to him, by Captain Dunstan himself; and from the possibility of that she shrank with dread which would have impelled her to any amount of effort at concealment. The



very truth and loyalty of her were dangerous to her now, for they precluded even the perception by her of a middle course, dictated by any thought for circumstances: they brought her face to face with her own belief and her own declaration that in the tie of marriage there must be found all, or nothing. She must get away; but how?

This was the question that haunted her now—since the first one had been silenced by the terrible answer—all the beautiful long days of early summer, while the woods, and the fields, and the gardens she so dearly loved were putting on their fairest garments of greenery and delicate-scented blossom, for the gladdening of her eyes, when they should shine with the old brightness of health and youth. This was the question that haunted her in the night, when those eyes were held waking by her trouble in the brief darkness, to close for their respite of quiet sleep only just before the early dawn.

Janet had at times the strangest feeling

as though he were dead, a feeling which, when the spell of it was on her, did not yield to his presence. After she became able to observe what was passing around her—how much he had been with her during the worst of her illness she never asked or knew—she was aware that he came several times during the day to inquire how she was, to sit a little while in her room, speaking softly with her attendants, or with Julia or Amabel—for either was almost always with her—but he spoke little to herself, and did not seem surprised at her silence.

At first the sight of him, and the sound of his voice, caused her such intense pain that she could conceal it only by a superhuman effort, and thence arose her habit of keeping her eyes closed while he was in the room, a habit which escaped notice, except by one person. Amabel observed those closed eyelids; she heard the sigh that accompanied the lifting of them when Captain Dunstan went away.


When several hours elapsed without her

seeing him, Janet would get that strange feeling over her as if he were dead, or, still more frequently, as if she herself were dead, and all that had happened was left behind in a world with which she had nothing henceforth to do, but whose shadowy memories pursued her with unrelenting urgency, and put her to unremitting pain. This was the more tranquil of the two moods between which she alternated, and it became less frequent as she grew stronger, and drew nearer to health. The other mood was one of fierce and fiery suffering, in which the past mocked, the present tortured, and the future terrified her—one in which she recounted to herself her own story with all the bitterness of deadly jealousy, and all the sickening anguish of despair.

The past that mocked her was a past in which she had dreamt but one dream, cherished but one love—in which she might have been happy with her dream, with her love, asking for nothing beyond them. The friend who had filled her life

with blessings had however unconsciously overthrown them all by one action. Janet did not know, or care to know, how it was that Mrs. Drummond had made that revelation to Dunstan which had been the ruin of the life she longed and purposed to bless; she did not know how it was that her old friend had found out the secret of her love. When from her heart arose the cry, "Oh, my dear one, how could you have done this to me? How could you, who know me so well, know me so little?" there was not mingled with it any blame of Mrs. Drummond. She had read the girl's heart, and had laid open the page before another reader, and so, with the best intentions, she had undone the work of several of her own past years.

Very differently did Janet think of Dunstan. Against him, at times, there rose up in her heart a hot and bitter anger—such anger as can only co-exist with love, because its agony could have no more superficial source. He knew she loved



him, and he married her for the sake of "gratitude." The word was his own ; he had made the avowal in her hearing. He had done this false, horrible, cruel thing, against which her love, her pride, her dignity, her modesty, her self-respect revolted almost equally. Because she had given him money, and he owed her "gratitude," he had taken herself, and never asked her consent to the transaction. He had deceived her, he had utterly sacrificed her to his own pride, to what he supposed to be his conscience, his sense of what he owed to her and himself. He had done this, because, the woman he had loved being unattainable by him, it was comparatively easy for him to discharge his debt in this way.

Janet's proud heart, its gentleness overborne for the time by the stronger feeling, was wrung with the agony of this thought. He had so little understood, so little cared to understand her, that he had not felt he was doing her a wrong, deadly, unspeakable, unpardonable, though it were never

to be revealed to her in this world—a wrong which every day of their lives passed together, while she lived in the fool's paradise of a lie, intensified. He had thought to repay her for fortune by marriage—how had he proposed to repay her for love? What a base imitation was that which had indeed never quite deceived her, although she had not known the origin, or been able to define the nature of the disappointment, and the doubt that had beset her!

What a pure and single-hearted devotion had hers been! With what humility and unbounded grateful joy she had loved him, regarding herself as the most absolutely fortunate of women, and resting in the belief that the love which had been his sole motive for marrying her, must, although it could not approach her own, be the strongest and the deepest of his feelings, too! When the sense of disappointment with which she had vainly struggled importuned her most, when the doubt which she vainly resisted made most head against

her peace, she was wont to assure herself of this. He had married her because he loved her; and if ever anything so dreadful as his coming to regret it should happen—for the haunting whisper took this form sometimes—the fault would be her own.

But now there was no more of this humble, deprecatory mood for Janet, a mood which, perchance, had no catastrophe disturbed it, might have helped her much in that inevitable transition from an unrealizable ideal to the actualities of a very tolerable sort of life, as human lives are, which in the ordinary course of experience and training lay before her. By becoming her husband, Dunstan had done her an intolerable wrong, the only wrong, perhaps, which he could have done her, without finding any plea for him in her heart, which was so entirely his; and the very unity of her nature, the absolute absence in her of the faculty of comprehending compromise, made it impossible that she should regard that wrong in what others would call

a reasonable light. She had been the victim of a polite sham from the first ; it had all been nothing ! Among the many sources whence Janet drew waters of bitterness during those terrible days, was that of her own increased knowledge of the way of looking at things common to her husband and to the " world " he had lived in, to which he belonged, from which she was altogether alien.

Unless she could conceal from him what she had learned, and get away without an explanation, she might have to endure the torture of remonstrance from him, of persuasion, perhaps of incredulous surprise ; and that she could not bear. He had married her from " gratitude," without love, he had married her loving another woman, and he would, it might be, say to her that this indeed was so, but that she should have no cause to complain of him—had he not said just that to Julia?—that she must make the best of it ; that married people, with good temper, and good manners, and a good fortune, might

get on very well together without romance. She had heard more than once some such treason and blasphemy as this spoken in the world of which she had had a glimpse, and she had revolted against it, even as only an external heresy, which in no way could profane the sanctity of that loyal love which was poor Janet's sole religion. To hear such treason and blasphemy from him would be more than she could, more than she need endure; she must do anything rather than incur the risk of having to listen to it. He would try to keep her with him, for the sake of appearances, out of consideration for the world which he prized and deferred to, the world which she neither loved nor hated, but simply did not take into account at all; which had no meaning for the bereft and betrayed heart, that had been worshipping a phantom which had made itself air. He would not resort to unkind means, for Dunstan was essentially a gentleman, but persuasion would torture her, and reason would be the most terrible kind of folly to a woeful mind like

hers. She was, however, certain he would respect her last request, that she might be left unmolested, when the thing was done and over, and the gulf was set between them. She never asked herself how she was to bear the separation from him, how the long, slow days would pass with her. It had all become impossible, it was all as though it had never been, save for the falsehood, and the ruin, and the pity of it. And there was no form or shape in the future for her who, held in bonds of pain and weakness by the present, was bent only on flight from the treason and betrayal of the past. ◆

How the horrid tenacity of her memory tormented her! She had taxed it but little, save with records of Dunstan, and it held them with scrupulous faith. She lived again through every hour of the time before the news of Mr. Thornton's death reached her husband, and she realised that from the moment at which he had learned that fact the question which had haunted her had taken voice. Then, trying to see

clearly into a mental condition hardly comprehensible by her transparent truthfulness and oneness of soul, she discerned that the husband who had loved her never, whose debt of "gratitude" had unexpectedly become so irksome, because the barrier between himself and the woman whom he had loved always was removed, would surely come to hate her. From that hour there had been before his mind's eye the image of Laura, not as the wife of another, parted from himself by her own act and choice, hopelessly out of his reach, the object of a regret, vague and fading,—deadly wrong to Janet as such an image was,—but the mocking picture of what might have been but for Janet's importunate love and his own disproportionate and untimely "gratitude." Thenceforth Janet's presence became an active evil; his wife was no longer the mere obligatory accompaniment of his fortune and position, she was the living obstacle to his happiness, the woman who stood between him and Laura, free now, and to be won. How, if

Laura were won, and once more by another, and the pangs of jealousy were again to seize on Dunstan as, together with the pangs of despised love, they had seized on Janet ?

From the picture that her imagination conjured up she shrank with terror ; from the thought that he might come to hate her—after the polite and disguised fashion of household hatred among people of the world, no doubt, but with all that repulsion in it which his love of Laura would lend to the feeling. He would come to hate her when he should see, beside her, the aerial image of the woman who, but for her, might sit at his table, and slumber on his breast—the woman whose husband had been happy, and had loved her, and was dead !

Yes, he would hate her, and nothing that she could do could hinder that hatred. For she could not die. Until great suffering comes to the young, they are apt to flatter themselves that if it should come they will be sure to escape from it by death ; but the

first tight grip it takes of them teaches them that it is not so. While Janet was very ill she had no memory of her sorrow, and when she awoke to it clearly, without transition, she knew that she was not going to die. Yes, he would hate her, and with cause, for she must, while she lived, represent to him the weapon of Fate wherewith he had been opposed and defeated. And she must bear that knowledge; but at least she need never read it in his face, hear it in his voice, look at him with the knowledge that it was stirring at his heart. Freedom to him or to herself it was not in her power to give; but she could go far from him, and, until his freedom should be granted him by the hand that cannot err from justice and from mercy, no word or sign from her should reach him more.

With all her senses perfectly untroubled, and with her friends about her, Janet, living in a world infinitely apart from them, made her plans. Sometimes she wondered, in a vague way, that it did not grieve her to think of a parting for ever

between herself and those friends : it did not ; she loved them, she knew all their solicitude and care ; she knew that they would grieve when she was gone ; but she felt no grief on that account. There was no room, there was no strength in Janet's heart for any divided sorrow.

Julia had been brave and truthful in what she said to Dunstan ; she understood in part what he had done ; she had at least a true woman's perception that for a man to marry from any other motive than love is a cruel deed, and an outrage, however disguised, to honour. Janet was grateful to Julia, and she liked to think, whenever she could divert her thoughts from their centre of pain, of Julia as a happy wife. That would be soon, they told her, and then Julia would forget her, or, at least, she would cease to grieve about her.

And Amabel ? It was different with regard to her ; numbed as were Janet's feelings, all but one, she was not insensible to that difference ; she did not forget

the promise she had made to Amabel, or how strangely Amabel had pressed her for a renewal of it on that wedding-day from the remembrance of which she shrank in terror. Janet did not mean to be unfaithful to that promise. Janet knew that, no matter to what pain she should have to put her, she might trust Amabel, and many an hour did she lie still, or sit in the deep old-fashioned arm-chair by the window—as she had seen Mrs. Drummond sit, musing, in the bygone years—and, holding the girl's hand in hers, ponder over the project which was to be put into execution when her strength returned, with a great pity and hope for Amabel in her poor tired heart.

“It will be hard on her at first,” Janet would think, “but it will be well for her in the end. Sir Wilfrid will come back with Mr. Sandilands, and he will come to his friend when I am here no longer—I daresay he will blame me heavily, even if he knows all about the woman whom my husband loves, for men stand by men—and he will

fall in love with Amabel this time. She will be very happy with him ; she will not fret about his passing fancy for me, for *she* will not have been deceived."

All this time Janet was unaware of the close scrutiny with which Amabel was observing her, and she little thought how nearly that curious gift of intuition and of sympathy which her friend possessed was enabling her to discern her secret. "There is an arrow in her heart," Amabel had said to herself early in Janet's convalescence, "and the hand that shot it is her husband's."

From that moment, without questioning her by so much as a look, she seconded Janet's wishes. No less clearly than she perceived Janet's state of mind, did Amabel discern that the intimation of Janet's wish that he should go to London was welcome to Captain Dunstan ; and that there was something more in his acceptance of it than the not unnatural gladness with which a man escapes from a scene of dullness and illness, when things are on the

mind, and he can take a holiday creditably.

When the intelligence of Mrs. Monro's death was sent to Janet, those with her felt great uneasiness with respect to the effect that it might have upon her. It affected her but slightly. She said little to Julia on the subject, and Julia supposed she had so long looked for the event that she had grown accustomed to think of her sister-in-law as for ever passed away out of her own life. But Amabel knew better; to her Janet said, briefly,

"She has her wish at last, and he too. Am I to grudge that to them for my poor sake?"

There was no sorrow at all in Janet's heart for her sister-in-law; on the contrary, she thought of her with unselfish congratulation, with sinless envy. There was one in the deathless world whose heaven had been incomplete until she joined him there. To Janet the deathless world itself could never throughout all eternity give that especial happiness.

That night Janet took from a drawer of the old bureau a packet of letters. Among its contents were all those which Mrs. Monroe had written to her since she left England. There were none of very recent date; there were some of years ago. From the latter Janet selected a few, which she placed in a pocket of her travelling-bag; from those relating to Mrs. Monroe's sojourn at Nice she made some careful memoranda, and then she burned the letters.

* * * * *

The train by which Janet travelled to London, arrived in time to enable her to cross the Channel the same night. The steamer which carried her to Calais was that one in which she and Dunstan had crossed to Dover on their return to England. A dreary wonder fell upon her as she recognised the cabin and the stewardess, and felt absolutely secure from recognition herself, as well she might, for who, even though the constant press of strangers had not intervened to blunt impressions, could have seen in the pale-

faced, sad-eyed young woman in deep, plain mourning, her hair completely hidden by the white border of an English widow's cap, who sat in a corner of the cabin, with a leather bag at her feet, the beautiful, richly-dressed, assiduously waited-on lady, whose servants had made such a fuss about the amount and quality of accommodation for her and themselves, and whose equipment included every accessory of travelling fashion.

Twenty-four hours after she left Bevis, Janet was seated in the *parloir* of a humble little convent in a remote quarter of Paris, where the surroundings are of a squalid enough order, but where high walls shut in and lofty trees shelter the quiet, unseen lives that are passed in teaching the children of the poorest among the poor, and succouring the aged sick. In a superior, but still humble, portion of the house, a few ladies resided as boarders, and Janet was waiting to see if she could be received among the number. Presently a mild, grave woman, in the dress of a religious,

entered the room, holding in her hand a faded letter. It was one of those which Janet had put away in the corner of her travelling-bag. She bowed to Janet, who rose, with nervous anxiety plainly to be read in every feature, and said, in French,

“Our Reverend Mother remembers Madame Monro perfectly—that dear little widow who was here with us in her first days of great mourning—and she sees that Madame is of her family and dear to her. This letter is enough ; our Reverend Mother will receive Madame.”

CHAPTER XI.

A Question of Identity.

FEW weeks after the death of Mrs. Monro, Miss Wells, having hung up the key of her apartment in the Bureau of the old hotel at Nice, set out in that independent fashion which she prized so highly—not, indeed, for Jericho, but on a sufficiently vague expedition. She needed change and recreation; the last task of her self-appointed work which she had accomplished had cost her a good deal, and, if she was to go on, she must not fret or look back, and, above all, she must take care of her own health. She would have a pleasant ramble among mountains somewhere, but first she would go to Paris for

a few days. It was rather warm weather for Paris, where there was no sea to temper heat which Miss Wells did not mind at Nice, but that could not be helped. It was not her way to let herself be influenced by considerations of that kind; she had something to do at Paris, and when it was done, she would begin to take her holiday.

As she journeyed up to the beautiful city in a crowded and stuffy train, Miss Wells arranged in her methodical mind all that she meant to do in Paris, and the order of it. The business she had undertaken first, then a visit to a certain hospital, where she should get some useful hints, a few hours at the Salon, a few minutes in each of the great churches, a few purchases at the Bon Marché, a drive in the Bois, and then she would be off to the mountains. She meant to go to an hotel in the Rue St. Honoré, and to set about her business early the next day.

"Barrière de la Glancière," said Miss Wells to herself, as she looked over some

memoranda in her pocket-book. "I have not a notion where it is, but I daresay it will be a pleasant drive. And I am going on a pleasant errand. How glad they will be to get the money for their poor old people, and how pleased at her remembrance of them! It was a fine act of hers, too; there is a great deal of self-denial in that hundred pounds."

Miss Wells' business in Paris was the fulfilment of a request made by Mrs. Monro shortly before her death. She had saved out of her very limited means—she possessed only a small annuity, which died with her—one hundred pounds, and this sum she had confided to Miss Wells for a special purpose. She had no relative in the world except Mrs. Dunstan, and to her she wished a few of her personal effects to be sent; but the money she had saved she was free to dispose of, and it was to be given to the first friends whom she had found in her great trouble, by the hands of the last friend, who would see her safely through that trouble. Every other wish

which she had expressed had been faithfully carried out by Miss Wells, who was now about to fulfil this one. She felt rather curious and a little hurt about this Mrs. Dunstan, who had taken no notice of the letter in which she had written her the particulars of her only relative's death. The receipt of a packing-case, containing the articles sent to Bevis from Nice—not immediately after Mrs. Monro's death, but when Miss Wells became convinced that Mrs. Dunstan did not mean to write—was formally notified to her by Captain Dunstan, but no other communication reached her. Even that dear, lovely Mrs. Thornton, who had been so fond of Mrs. Monro, had not written a line, and though she was in such trouble herself, Miss Wells thought she might have done that; indeed, her own trouble would but have been a reason the more. It was very strange, considering all that they had gone through together, and Miss Wells felt a curious, contradictory kind of retrospective pity for the loneliness of her dead friend, who was so little missed or

remembered. She almost wondered that nice Miss Carmichael had not written, but she felt she must put these things out of her head; she had been particularly interested in a certain set of people who chanced to come in her way, but she was not going to be disappointed because they had soon and easily forgotten her.

In this healthy frame of mind, Miss Wells set out on her expedition to the distant region of Paris wherein her business lay.

A *porte-cochère* in a lofty, dingy wall, above which the gently-stirring boughs of some fine acacia-trees were visible, admitted Miss Wells to a peaceful scene. Three sides of a large piece of ground, which combined the features of a lawn and a garden, were enclosed by the main building and the wings of a very old house, with a leaden roof, tall narrow windows, and a flagged verandah. A superb acacia-tree occupied the centre of the lawn, where two or three wicker chairs and a light table strewn with needlework indicated

that the inmates of the house were wont to make a summer drawing-room of the smooth green sward under the spreading shade.

There would be some delay before Miss Wells could see the person for whom she inquired, and, the lawn being vacant, she asked to be permitted to wait there in the cool air, rather than in the *parloir*. She took one of the wicker chairs and sat patiently under the shade of the great acacia, feeling pleasantly the stillness and seclusion of the place, in which no one seemed to be stirring, though, as she knew, there was plenty of busy life within those walls. She had been there perhaps a quarter of an hour, when a slight sound, the sweeping of a woman's dress upon the green sward, caused her to turn in its direction. No doubt the person whom she expected to see was coming to her; a low-lying branch hid the approaching figure, but she discerned a plain black skirt. The next moment the figure came from behind the tree into full view. A tall,

slight, youthful form, clad in deep mourning ; a fair, delicate, pale face, surrounded by a widow's bonnet, which hid the bright hair, revealed themselves to Miss Wells, who sprang up with an exclamation of almost terrified surprise, and gazed at the lady with mingled fascination and recoil.

"I beg your pardon, I have disturbed you ; I came for my work," said the lady, as she passed Miss Wells, with a bow, and approached the table. But Miss Wells, from whose florid face the colour had vanished, and who was trembling quite visibly, made no conventional reply.

"For God's sake tell me who you are !"

No answer.

"Pray forgive me, I don't mean to be rude, but it is impossible—the likeness is so remarkable ; I never saw such a thing, and she was very dear to me !"

"She ! Whom ?"

"Janet Monro."

As they had come to her that day at The Chantry, as they had come to her that other day upon the terrace at Bevis, so the

ringing in her ears, the dull throbbing in her heart, came to Janet now, warning her. She caught at a chair and sank into it with a deep sigh, to the great alarm of Miss Wells.

“Ah! *mon Dieu*, is it that Madame Monro finds herself ill?”

This question was asked by the person whom Miss Wells had come to see—a kindly, middle-aged woman in the dress of a religious, who had joined them unperceived.

“Madame Monro! Is that the name of this lady?”

“Yes, yes, this is Madame Monro. Ah, she is better; it is nothing. It is the heat, and she is not strong. See, she is quite revived. Pardon, Madame, you wished to speak with me.”

“I did; but is it well to leave this lady? Are you better?”

She addressed Janet in that tone, solicitous but firm, which seldom failed to inspire liking and confidence, and Janet opened her eyes, with a faint smile.

"I am quite well now. It was nothing, only the heat."

"Remain where you are," said the religious, "and when Madame has told me her business, we will return to you. Poor little lady," she added, as she conducted Miss Wells to the parlour, "she has had her troubles, I fear, like all in this sad world, but she is at peace here, and she comes to us recommended by an old friend."

They entered the house, and were hidden from Janet.

She was recovering from the shock of the words that had been spoken to her, but only to bewilderment and fear. Had her term of rest and peace come to an end? Who was this stranger, kindly-natured and good indeed, if her face and her voice might be trusted, who evidently held a clue by which she might trace Janet's identity? Supposing she were to use it, and, discovering her secret, consider that she ought to reveal it? Then what could come to Janet except the miserable dread that, from any of those motives which were so

small and meaningless to her, her husband might disregard her prayer.

She tried to think that she was frightening herself for nothing; the stranger had come to the Reverend Mother on business of her own; she would forget the accidental likeness that had struck her so strongly, in the claims of that business, and, seeing Janet no more, would think of her no more. Then Janet rose, with the intention of going away, but found she could not walk a yard, or stand steadily, for the ringing and the throbbing, and when she sat down again she could not think at all clearly, but knew she must wait until somebody should come who would help her to get back to her room. She had heard somebody—she supposed it was Dr. Andrews—say, during her illness, that it looked as if she had had a shock, and that she was a bad subject for shocks. She must be so, indeed, when an occurrence such as this could make her so ill and helpless.

Miss Wells acquitted herself of her com-

mission, and was well rewarded by the gratitude of the Reverend Mother, who asked her many questions about the young widow who had cherished so lasting a remembrance of her sojourn in the little convent. It was curious, she said, except that the finger of the good God was to be seen in everything, if it were but looked for, that they were able just then to do something in memory of their benefactress. The poor little lady out there—the Reverend Mother pointed to the window—had come to them in the character of a relative of Mrs. Monroe, asking them to receive her as a boarder for Mrs. Monroe's sake, and they had done so.

“Indeed!” said Miss Wells, “and when was that?”

She had not mentioned the date of Mrs. Monroe's death, and the Reverend Mother's answer let in a flood of light upon her by informing her that this relative of Mrs. Monroe's had been received at the convent within ten days after that event.

“What was her precise relationship to Mrs. Monro?”

“She was her cousin, of the same name, too, as she tells me. She will be cheered when she learns this curious circumstance; and she needs it. She has no friends in Paris.”

What had happened? Of Janet’s identity Miss Wells had no doubt. That the mysterious fact of Mrs. Dunstan’s being where she was implied some great misfortune, she felt equally certain; and the recollection that the friend she had so lately lost had loved this only relative, stirred strongly in Miss Wells’ heart, a heart which never shrank from anyone in sickness or sorrow with a sense of strangership.

At this moment the Reverend Mother was told that somebody else wanted to see her, and Miss Wells availed herself of the opportunity to return to the lawn, and, as she said, introduce herself to her countrywoman.

Janet was still sitting where they had

left her, her head lay wearily against the tall back of the deep wicker chair, her hands lay idly in her lap; she was the very image of lassitude and hopelessness, far more sad to see than ever her namesake had been, even when she was fading most rapidly.

Miss Wells went close up to her, and dealing promptly with the nervous apprehension in her grief-stricken face, said,

"I am Martha Wells; it was I who wrote to you from Nice. Janet Monro died with her hand in mine. Will you not trust me, Mrs. Dunstan?"

* * * * *

In England, as elsewhere, time was running on, and the first impression made by the events that had occurred at Bevis had passed away. Captain Dunstan had been solicitous only that it should be understood, in the fullest possible sense, that his wife was not to blame for the separation between them, which it soon became known had taken place.

For this very reason Janet was all the

more severely blamed, especially as the rights and wrongs of the matter were but imperfectly known, and the most charitably-disposed towards her supposed she must be mad, and that Captain Dunstan was hushing it up. At all events, it was plain that he felt it very severely, and that there was an end to all the pleasant prospects of Bevis proving an "acquisition" to the neighbourhood.

Captain Dunstan did feel Janet's flight very severely—as a terrible blow to his pride, and an extraordinary revelation of her character. It was not only that he had never suspected the existence of such love and such jealousy, of such an exalted and impossible ideal in her mind as would render the knowledge of his motives for making her his wife intolerable to her, while yet she should be perfectly secure from anything that could be regarded as want of kindness and observance on his part; but he had never believed in feelings of the kind at all, on anyone's part, out of a romance. Of course he knew she loved him; Mrs.

Drummond told him so, and she herself had owned it in a very sweet and becoming manner when he "proposed" to her, and many times besides during the brief engagement, which he had found, to tell the truth, rather irksome. But that she should take things in this tragic way astonished him. It hurt him keenly, too, and made him think, as he had never thought before, of what the vows and the promises of marriage mean, how awful they are, how lightly taken and how ill kept, even when there is no open or defiant breach of the letter of them. He had always behaved well to Janet, and he did not doubt that he should have continued to do so; but he could not deny to himself that he had always been thinking of another woman, and that she had accused him truly, convicting him out of his own mouth, and left him, her interpretation of their respective positions being granted, justly.

It was more the manner of it than the action itself that he regretted so vividly.

Perhaps the unsuitability between them would, under any circumstances, have proved too great for comfort, but in that case there would have been a middle course so easily taken, one adopted by lots of people every day, without scandal or gossip, or the unpleasantness of this method of hers. He was very seriously troubled about Janet, and oppressed by the fear that she might be actually suffering in material ways while her retreat remained undiscovered. Of course he should find her some day; he never really doubted that; and in the meantime he was most anxious that it should not be suspected that he did not know what had become of her. And it was not suspected beyond the small circle of those who knew the fact.

The shock and surprise of the desperate step his wife had taken, and the success which attended her intention of concealment, had the effect of very considerably clearing his moral vision; and Janet, if it would have been a satis-

faction, might have had that of knowing that she was perpetually in his remembrance, and, in a strange sort of way, an object of curiosity, a subject of questioning to him, as she had never been before. It was as though he had married one woman, and his wife had turned out to be another just as she vanished from him ; that other a less gentle, less perfect, less complaisant being indeed, more wilful, but more interesting, more individual. And yet, in the bottom of his heart, when Edward Dunstan mused upon the revelation of Janet's love, and what her ideal was, he thought—if it had only been the right woman who had loved him thus !

Events had also marched with time, and late in the autumn Julia Carmichael and John Sandilands were to be married. John had come home with Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, and the wedding was to take place at Hunsford. Dunstan and Esdaile had not met since Esdaile's return, but they were to meet soon, for Dunstan had asked Esdaile to come to Bevis after the wedding,

and Esdaile had promised to do so. John Sandilands and Julia were also to visit him before they left England. It would be a strange meeting, and Dunstan would be glad when it was over.

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile and Amabel Ainslie were the only guests at Hunsford in addition to the bridegroom, and the wedding was a very quiet affair, both because the parties chiefly concerned wished it, and on account of Laura, who had come from Scotland to be with her cousin on the occasion, and to take leave of her.

Lady Rosa Chumleigh was in an unprecedentedly amiable mood. She liked John Sandilands; she was very glad to get Julia disposed of, and, since things had been so comfortably settled by the birth of her grandson, she had been on unusually good terms with Providence—persons of her kind sometimes are affected in this way by what they feel to be an escape. She was more disposed to let the Colonel approach nearer to the realisation of his ideal, a quiet life, than she had ever been before within his long

but little varied experience. Julia looked very well, and was very happy in her quiet way, and John Sandilands had a piece of news to tell her when they had left Hunsford; it had been especially stipulated that he was not to tell her sooner, which would make her happier still.

Sir Wilfrid's wedding-present to his friend was a splendid one; it was the coffee-plantation. John was going out to manage his own property now. Sir Wilfrid had hit upon this conclusive and satisfactory method of redressing, to a certain extent, that inequality between his own lot and that of John Sandilands which had always been a puzzle to him.

"Considering he has just married the only woman he ever wanted to marry, and that she is quite ideally suited to him, I'm inclined to think the weight has got into the other scale now," said Sir Wilfrid to himself, a little ruefully, as he entered the house after he had speeded the happy pair on their way, and done a little good-natured pottering with the Colonel.

He found Laura in the morning-room with Amabel. The infant was sleeping in his lace-bedecked cradle beside the hearth, and Sir Wilfrid having been indulged with a peep at him began to talk with Laura of the wedding and of present matters first; then of the past; of the dark days at Nice, of Julia's arrival, of their journey back to England, of the friends whom they left behind.

"If I had wanted reminding of it, which I certainly did not," said Sir Wilfrid, "I should have had it all brought before me by the sight of Miss Wells and Mrs. Monro."

"Miss Wells and Mrs. Monro?"

"Yes. I saw them for a moment; it was on the platform at Fontainebleau only. As we went by, I put my head out of the carriage and waved my hat; but I can't tell whether they recognised me. Miss Wells looked just the same; Mrs. Monro very wan and ill; it was only a glimpse, but I saw that, I am sorry to say. What accounts do you get of her?"

He paused, and glanced from Laura to Amabel. The former was staring at him in unmitigated astonishment; the face of the other was suffused with a peculiarly vivid sample of what Amabel called her "unfortunate blush."

"What have I said?" asked Sir Wilfrid.

"That you saw Mrs. Monro with Miss Wells, on your way home with John. It is impossible."

"But I tell you I did see them; there is no doubt about it; I saw them as distinctly as I see you and Miss Ainslie."

"At what date was that, Sir Wilfrid?"

"The fifteen of August."

"Mrs. Monro," said Laura, solemnly, "died at Nice in June?"

"Died! Died in June? Mrs. Thornton, you must think me mad, if you will, but I most emphatically declare that I saw her, in her usual dress—the English widow's cap, I think, caught my eye first—with Miss Wells, standing on the platform at Fontainebleau. Pray don't doubt me;


pray don't laugh at me ; I tell you the exact truth."

"Laugh ! I am not likely to laugh at such a thing. What can it mean ?" She put her hand to her brow for a moment, and thought, the next she exclaimed. "Amabel ! It was Mrs. Dunstan ! She has been with Miss Wells all this time ! Rely upon it, it was she. Oh, Sir Wilfrid, you have found her !"

"Thank God !" said Amabel, in her heart, while her tears fell silently,— "thank God, she will be persuaded, she will come back ; it will all come right ; and yet she will know that I kept my word as faithfully as she kept her promise."

CHAPTER XII.

The Window in the Wall.

 MABEL AINSLIE had grieved much over Janet's flight. No other fulfilment of a prevision, and there had come such to her, or she had fancied them, was ever so unwelcome as the conviction that the marriage in which she had foreseen unhappiness was not happy. No other effort had ever been so painful to her as that by which, accepting the fact that Janet could not but do as she had done, Amabel had resolutely kept Janet's secret through all the wonderings and conjectures that followed. Only to Captain Dunstan and to Julia were the real circumstances of Janet's departure

known, and it was never suspected that Amabel had any further knowledge. She accepted without comment Mrs. Cathcart's suggestion that the matter could not be discussed with any profit, and she scrupulously avoided it. Of Captain Dunstan she had seen very little since the early summer. Janet had not been mentioned between them.

In the consultation which ensued on Laura's convincing elucidation of Sir Wilfrid's surprising statement, Amabel joined, without letting it be discovered that she had previously known anything, by earnestly entreating Sir Wilfrid to carry the news to Captain Dunstan, and to accompany him, if, as no doubt would be the case, he should decide on immediately going in search of Janet.

"I believe there is no one in the world who could speak to her with such effect as you could," said Amabel; "and she is too just to refuse to see you. None of us can tell whether she might not entirely refuse to see Captain Dunstan. And then Miss

Wells thinks so highly of you, she will take your view."

It was agreed that this should be done. Laura thought there was a very perceptible readiness to accept Amabel's judgment on that and every other point, on the part of Sir Wilfrid Esdaile. Laura was interested in this strange story more than she had expected ever to be interested in anything again, but it was not until afterwards that she came to the knowledge of the large part she herself had played in it.

On the following morning Sir Wilfrid Esdaile left Hunsford, and the first meeting between the friends since that memorable day on which he had quitted Bevis a rejected suitor to the woman who he now hoped would be restored to her husband through his means, took place a few hours later.

Dunstan met him at the railway station, and, before they reached Bevis, Esdaile, to whom he had not meant to mention Janet at all, had told him the news. Two days later they left England together, and

travelled with but little delay to Nice. Sir Wilfrid Esdaile was readily recognized at the hotel in the old part of the town, whither he proceeded, unaccompanied in the first instance by Dunstan, and, on his inquiring for Miss Wells, he learned that she was not there just then. Miss Wells had been a good deal away from her headquarters of late, since shortly after the English lady's death ; she had gone away then for three months.

"Did she return alone?" asked Sir Wilfrid, of the proprietor of the hotel, who held his eccentric English *locataire* in great respect, and was ready to give any information to a friend of hers.

No, not alone, and the strange thing was that the lady who came with her might have been the twin sister of the poor little lady, so sad and gentle, who died in the summer. They had all been astonished—it was like seeing a ghost ; but, after all, there was nothing surprising ; the new lady was the near relation of the other, and of the same name. The

proprietor never wasted time in the vain attempt to pronounce that name.

After a short stay, Miss Wells went away again, taking her friend with her. No, he could not tell his excellency where they had gone to; Miss Wells never sent them an address, she never had her letters forwarded when she was away, and he could not say positively when she might be expected to return. But yes, there was no doubt at all that she would come back, only the exact time was uncertain, and it was also sure that she was not returning alone, for she had given orders about certain changes in her rooms, on account of the new lady. This was satisfactory to a certain extent, and Sir Wilfrid proceeded to act on the information he had elicited. He inquired whether the rooms adjoining Miss Wells' apartment were vacant, and learning that they were, engaged them for himself and a friend from that day. He then wrote a few words on a card, which he put into an envelope addressed to Miss Wells, to be

given to her immediately on her arrival. In fact, he saw it tucked under her key, which hung on its numbered hook in the Bureau, before he returned to Captain Dunstan, at the Hôtel de France, and reported progress.

To them both it was a disappointment to find that they must wait, and for an uncertain time, before they could hope to see Janet. They had discussed the matter very little, hardly alluded to it during their journey, and now the very closeness of the confidence between them, and the associations of the past, rendering them averse to speak upon the subject of which they were thinking most, the delay, with its restraint, its uncertainty, and its prolonged excitement, became irksome to them. There was a ready resource ; time need not hang heavily on their hands, and with the sight of the place the former fascination of the gaming-tables revived for Esdaile. Dunstan had no particular taste for gambling, but he was restless and nervous, and he wanted to kill time.

Three, four, five days passed away ; the weather was very fine, there was no sign of Miss Wells' return, and when the regular inquiry, made by Sir Wilfrid each morning, had received the regular reply, the two young men would leave their dull hotel for the fashionable quarter, and soon find themselves with the rest of the world at Monte Carlo.

It seemed as if fate were bent on playing Sir Wilfrid Esdaile an ill trick by this delay, for he not only fell into the old temptation, but the devil's luck declared itself for him, and he won largely and continuously. Presently he came to be talked about among the frequenters of the place of the lower classes, just as a gentleman who is lucky on the turf, becomes unconsciously a hero, to the theoretically horsey idlers who lurk and slouch about the places where the mysterious transactions in which he has won distinction are carried on.

Their sojourn at Nice had lasted for ten days, when Esdaile, having turned into

the Bureau one morning, as usual, to ask his invariable questions, found himself a spectator of a household row. The stern and business-like lady who presided in the Bureau, the proprietor of the hotel, and a waiter, the identical person who was in the habit of waiting on Esdaile and Dunstan, were the parties to the quarrel. Esdaile immediately withdrew, having heard only the curt and determined order of the proprietor to the misdemeanant to "make his packet, and go on the field." The man was civil and quick, though an ill-looking fellow—a Nizzard of the hard and dark type, and singularly taciturn. Esdaile had noticed him, because, as neither Dunstan nor himself had a servant with him—a precaution against talk being carried back to Bevis, suggested by Mrs. Cathcart—he had been in constant request. The man passed him presently, as he stood at the *porte-cochère*, with a civil bow, and Esdaile returned to the Bureau. The irate proprietor was no longer there; the lady in charge was adding up a column of figures

with angry energy, and, interrupting herself to answer Sir Wilfrid's question, she could not repress an allusion to her grievance. Never was there known such a *corvée* as the managements of those *garçons* now-a-days. And Giuseppe had been a pearl, a true pearl until now, when his insolence all about a nothing, a miserable little nothing, had procured him his *congé*, for the patron never would suffer insolence. And a nothing! Anyone would think Giuseppe had done it express for the very purpose of being turned out. But she begged pardon—no, there was no news of Miss Wells this morning more than another. Presently Dunstan and Esdaile went out for the day.

The business of the hotel, not very brisk, went on just as usual. Giuseppe and his packet, of modest size—he carried it, with a scowl, past the Bureau—were gone, and the afternoon was drawing towards dusk. There was no noise and no stir about the entrance or in the court of the old hotel, and for the

moment the Bureau was unoccupied. This must have been a moment watched for by a man who, entering boldly enough through the open gateway, paused in front of the green-curtained glass-door and listened for a moment, then boldly entered. He was not in the room a minute, but he came out of it with a key hidden up his sleeve, and then he quietly turned to the staircase on the right, and with perfect unconcern ascended it. True, Giuseppe was a dismissed servant, and he had no business there; but, if anyone should meet and question him, there was a ready answer in the incompleteness of his packet—something forgotten in the *combles* where he had slept, and his neglecting to use the staircase *de service* would be only an impertinence the more. Fortune, who, if she favours the brave, is not always unkind to the dishonest, was propitious to Giuseppe; he met no one, he experienced no alarm, and he let himself into the little vestibule of Miss Wells' apartment with perfect ease and safety. He then passed, with a

noiseless tread, through the suite of rooms, and reaching the last of them, profited by the still lingering light to make certain arrangements in a business-like manner. The furniture of the room had undergone some alterations since the time of its occupation by Mrs. Monro; but the large table, with its ranges of books and papers, was still in its former place, across the door of communication with the adjoining apartment. Giuseppe cleared the books and papers away, and, having thus lightened the table, he very slowly drew it along the wall, so carefully that a passer-by in the corridor outside must have had quick ears indeed to hear a sound, leaving the door free. Then he easily picked the old-fashioned lock, and, opening the doors, looked into the room on the other side.

Apparently he only wanted to look in just at present, for he softly shut the door again, and, having deposited a pocket-lantern and a box of matches on the floor in a corner, he selected a particularly

comfortable chair, and placing it in the shelter of the bed-curtains, so near to the wall that any sound in the next room would be audible to him at once, he sat down and waited. Waited, while the darkness fell, and the stars came out, and the unoccupied rooms turned chill and ghostly; waited with set purpose, and patience which would have been becoming to a good action. One could not account for accidents, but he had taken his precautions admirably, and the causes he might have had for fear were reduced to their minimum. He munched a slab of chocolate, and waited. The ordinary noises of the hotel, as night fell, came to his ears; then the entry of the chamber-maids into the adjoining room, and their departure; then no sound for a long while. And then the sound that Giuseppe was waiting for.

It was that of the voices of the English excellencies, who were such good friends and good comrades—in his ordinary business Giuseppe would not ask better than to

serve them—and one of whom was so wonderfully lucky at the tables that it might almost be believed he had drawn a good number *pour tout de bon* but for this stroke of extraordinary business which Giuseppe was about to do, thereby crossing the luck of the English excellency. He waited while the friends talked, he heard them laugh (his ear was at the key-hole now), he heard another sound, sweeter than any laughter, the clear, musical clink of gold, as the English excellency who had the devil's luck threw a handful of tinkling pieces on the table; he heard the only English phrase whose meaning he knew, "good night," spoken by each, and then there was silence, and he waited again; waited a long while, it seemed to him, for the light to be put out in the room of the excellency who had the devil's luck.

At length it occurred to Giuseppe that perhaps the excellency did not intend to put out the light at all. With cat-like agility and noiselessness he climbed on the

table, and, standing at the end of it, steadied himself with one hand against the door, while he looked through the little window in the wall. Looked into a large, dingy, but not uncomfortable room, well lighted, and with a pleasant fire of deep red logs upon the open hearth. In front of the hearth was a *fauteuil* of the traditional red velvet, and in it reclined Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, sound asleep; a half-smoked cigarette between his lips. Giuseppe's eager gaze first took in every feature of the scene; then dwelt with all the eagerness of greed upon the table at Esdaile's elbow. There, scattered in careless profusion, lay the devil's luck, in the form of a heap of gold and notes, and a bulky pocket-book. An open book also lay upon the table; and Esdaile had been cutting its pages open; with a curious paper-knife, too, for it was Dunstan's dagger, that fine thin blade in a carved tortoise-shell sheath which he bought at Galle, in the days before he was rich enough to lend an ear to the blandishments of the traders in

“catty eye,” and “pinkee collal.” An alcove, which contained the bed, and across which the curtains were snugly drawn, faced the door in the wall.

As things were going, Giuseppe might have long to wait; the English excellency slept with such unembarrassed ease in his *fauteuil* that, while the fire kept the temperature even, he was not more likely to wake than if he were in his bed. Time was growing precious, for, although Giuseppe knew a way of getting out of the hotel without resorting to *concierge* or *cordon*, he would rather not avail himself of it, if he could contrive to slink out again by the entry as he had slunk in. He stepped softly down from the table, gently pushed the door open, and gliding through the aperture, approached the table without making the slightest sound. At this instant one of the red-hearted logs tumbled over and struck the ash-tray, rousing Esdaile, who opened his eyes and shifted his position. Still as a stone stood Giuseppe behind him, holding

his breath, his eyes glittering and terrible.

Esdaile moved again, threw his arm out, and knocked the open book off the edge of the table. It fell just behind him, and the dagger dropped at Giuseppe's feet. Slowly, with utter noiselessness, he bent down and felt for it on the ground, but without shifting his eyes from Esdaile's head, showing above the back of the *fautuil*. Again Esdaile moved, and this time he pushed the chair upon its castors so that he was turned half away from the hearth, half towards the door in the wall, and only a movement as instantaneous as it was noiseless enabled Giuseppe to shift his own ground and escape detection. That half-turn of Esdaile's, rendering Giuseppe's retreat by the door in the wall impossible, made a difference of immense import in the situation. Giuseppe's intentions, in the scheme which he had been contemplating for several days, had been strictly limited to robbery. The English excellency asleep, Giuseppe would enter the room, secure his booty, leave the room in

the same way, replace the table to bar the door of communication, restore everything to its usual appearance, and decamp in safety. But now the man whom he had come to rob was only half asleep, facing the table on which lay the devil's luck, and half facing the door.

"So much the worse for him—his luck has turned. I shall have to kill him now."

With this thought, Giuseppe—his hand closed upon Dunstan's dagger—fell back, step by step, until he had reached the alcove. He glided behind the curtain, and waited until the swift moments should decide whether Esdaile would wake up completely, or drop into a deep sleep again.

Long after the sober business of the old hotel was supposed to be concluded for the night, there arose a hubbub in the Bureau, and the *concierge* was loud in protest, and vehement in apologies. Miss Wells and her friend had arrived; no preparation was made for them; no message had been received.

“That comes of trusting people to send one’s messages,” said Miss Wells. “Henceforth I do my own wiring.”

It was most unfortunate, but it could not be helped. Miss Wells and her friend had been detained for several hours in consequence of an accident on the line, which was also unfortunate, for her friend was far from strong.

A small procession escorted the ladies to their apartment, with luggage, lights, and a basket of firewood. With everything, it seemed, except the means of getting into the rooms, for the key, with the right number on its leaden label, taken off the numbered hook in the Bureau, would not unlock the door, and consternation ensued. There was nothing for it but to fetch a locksmith, and in the interval Miss Wells seated herself on a box and opened her letters, while the lady of the Bureau, with whom nothing had gone right that day since Giuseppe’s unaccountable conduct, took such care as she could of Janet. One of those communications which had been

awaiting Miss Wells gave her so much satisfaction that she was ready to meet every inconvenience with good humour.

"I accidentally discovered that Mrs. Dunstan is with you,"—were the words written on Esdaile's card—"to the great relief and joy of us all. I am here to see you on behalf of Captain Dunstan—staying in the house. Say nothing to her, but let me know when you can see me."

How thankful Miss Wells was! How doubly glad that the person to intervene in this matter, which caused her so much anxiety, was Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, the friend of the former dark days, and a paragon of perfection in her eyes. She looked upon Janet as she would have looked upon one who was going through the phases of a great illness, and concerning whom the bystanders had sore need of hope and patience. The "turn" would come, and then the convalescence; she felt sure of that; meantime her care and tending of that sick soul, for the sake of Janet herself, for the sake of her dead friend, for

the sake of her own mission in life, had been most tender and most vigilant. And now the "turn" was near; with her husband's message would begin the healing of Janet's "grievous wound," and the dawn of better days for her, when she should be brought to accept this mortal life as it is, to discard her dreams of it as it can never be.

"I will see him to-morrow," said Miss Wells to herself, "while she is taking a long rest."

The door was now opened, the luggage carried into the ante-chamber, fires were lighted, and, while Miss Wells, in the *salle-à-manger*, was discussing the possibilities of supper, Janet found her way to her own room, and, declining any aid, shut the door upon the bustle of their unexpected arrival. Except for the light she carried, the room was dark; the gloom was grateful to her, and she set the candle-stick on the lofty mantelpiece, took off her bonnet and cloak, and seated herself with her back to the feeble light

in a chair which stood near to the wall. She was very tired, but her thoughts were clear, and they were following a track on which they had been all that day—the track of investigation of her own will, of the meaning of herself and her life, of perception that she had been altogether wrong, not so much in what she had done as in the theory, the scheme of possibilities which she had constructed for herself, on that track which, after many windings, it may be, or perhaps with inconceivable quickness, leads the human spirit into the great liberty and the great light of the message :

“I am the Lord thy God, and thou shalt have no other gods but Me!”

“No ” other simply—not the fairest fancies, not the loftiest ambitions, not the purest affections. That was the liberty, that was the light towards which Janet was being led along the track of her thoughts, and the emancipation, the dawn were close at hand. She was thinking, with a curious clearness, considering the

surroundings, when a strange and startling sound, coming from the other side of the door, caught her ear. It was a deep and dreadful groan, and it drew Janet up, rigid and horror-stricken, on her feet. Only for an instant did she stand thus, the next she had perceived that light from the inner room was reflected on the little window in the wall over her head. Once more came that dreadful sound. It never occurred to Janet that the door was unlocked, though with the instantaneous perception of terror she saw that the table was drawn away; and with a great exertion of strength she pushed it sufficiently far back into its former place to enable her to stand on it and reach the glimmering glass. In a moment she was looking into the room, at this :

Sir Wilfrid Esdaile had fallen forward on the table where the gold and the notes had lain, his arms stretched out, his face, white and ghastly, lying on his right arm; he was bleeding profusely from a wound in the neck, and the dagger had been

thrust under one of his nerveless hands. For one moment Janet saw only this, and even as she tried to utter a cry, but was seized with the dreadful dumbness of horror, she felt the door against which her body was pressed shaken, and the latch on the other side moved. Then she shrank away for an instant, and again a desperate effort to push the door open was made; but the weight of the table with her own added to it resisted the attempt, and the assassin, suddenly apprised that his plan of retreat was foiled, stepped back from the door into her sight. She saw him plainly; it was the hotel-servant, Giuseppe.

For one instant he looked about him, as if at bay, the next he walked quickly towards the other door, which was on the same side as the hearth, and opened into an ante-room giving on the corridor. But something arrested his steps; he slid back, and in a second was again hidden by the curtain of the alcove.

Then Janet, stone-dumb, with bursting eyeballs, and icy hands clutching the wall,

saw the door on the same side as the hearth open, and a man enter the room. She heard the exclamation he uttered as he rushed across to the *fauteuil*, and raised Esdaile's lifeless body in his arms. He saw the wound, he saw the dagger, he knew what it meant; the fool who had done this forgot that, although men kill, they do not rob themselves, and where was the money, the devil's luck, gone to? He rolled a handkerchief tight and pressed it against the wound, and tied another handkerchief over that, not daring to let the blood flow while he gave the alarm—all this with incalculable quickness, and bending over Esdaile, with his back to the alcove. Then Giuseppe stole out once more, and Janet saw him. He must get out of that door by which the man had come in, unseen, if possible; if not, then the other excellency's luck would have turned also, and he should be obliged to kill him too. So Giuseppe swung his strong blue cotton pocket-handkerchief into a wisp, and knotted the ends in a

trice, and glided out with it ready in his hand.

He was close upon the group beside the hearth ; the door lay open, the man's back, as he bent over his friend, was turned towards him ; in another moment he would have crept past and out into the darkness, into safety, but Janet, who saw his terrible face, and the knotted throttling cloth, and could see in them no other design than murder, burst the bonds of her dumb terror, and dashed her clenched hand through the little window in the wall with a loud and piercing cry—" Edward ! Edward !" It had hardly rung through the room ere Dunstan had the assassin by the throat.

* * * * *

There was no hope from the first, and they all knew it. She could hardly have survived the shock, the doctors said, even though she had not been fatally injured by the fall, as Miss Wells knew she was when she lifted her. She suffered little, and was very quiet, speaking so seldom that

they were not quite sure of her consciousness at times; but they took the chance of it, and said everything very quietly to her which they wanted her to know, especially that Esdaile was recovering, and that Amabel would soon be with her. She was little moved, but she understood them; and she would listen when Dunstan spoke, and follow him with her eyes when he moved about the room. They thought she did not remember where she was, but fancied she was at Bevis, for she said, on the third day, very distinctly,

“I should like to see Mrs. Thornton just once;” and then, when they assured her that Mrs. Thornton would certainly come to her, she dozed for a few moments, and said, on waking, “We will walk on the stone terrace, and I will tell her.”

Miss Wells telegraphed to Laura, and she started for Nice at once; but Janet was not there any longer when Laura arrived. In the same room where she had been told of Robert's death, Laura stood beside the fair fading form in which the

lofty and loving spirit of Dunstan's wife had dwelt for its few earthly years.

"You saw her living?" she whispered to Amabel.

"Yes. I was here a few hours before. I heard her last words; they were very feeble, but quite distinct—'Thou shalt have no other gods but Me.'"

There was a long silence, then Laura asked—

"How does he bear it?"

"I did not think he could have felt so much about anything."

"Poor fellow!"

Laura laid rich roses on the pillow by the side of the fair calm face that would never shrink with pain from the thought of her any more, and went away back to England.

"She was worth a million of me," thought Laura, as she caught the last glimpse of the Bay of the Angels, and the sun was shining on the sea, as if winter and wreck were not, "and Robert was worth a million of Edward Dunstan, and

yet they are gone, and we are left. Why?
Ah me! why?"

But it did not come to Laura's mind that perhaps just that difference of value may have furnished the why.

* * * * *

In the wide, shady verandah of John Sandilands' bungalow, which has a comfortable, not to say elegant, appearance in these days, when Julia, who requires something more of her abode than space and shelter, rules there well and wisely, a party of three are enjoying the cool and scented evening air. It is a year after the events which are now a tale that is told. The party is composed of John Sandilands, Julia, and Mr. Gilchrist, who has the liveliest regard for these young people, and is happily convinced that they would not go "home," even if they had made their fortune. Mr. Gilchrist, arrayed in a suit of white, almost too spotless for belief, is walking up and down the verandah with a springy and juvenile step, and his face is rippling all over with smiles. John and

Julia are ensconced in their respective big Cingalese chairs, and a bamboo-table, laden with letters and newspapers, stands between them.

“Read it out again for me, my dear,” says Mr. Gilchrist, coming to a stand-still by Julia’s side, “though it is all in her own letter, and how she wore my poor coral on the happy occasion, I should like to hear it read out again.”

Julia smilingly complied.

“‘On the 9th instant, at St. Stephen’s Church, South Kensington, London, by the Rev. Charles Cathcart, Vicar of St. Mary’s, Wold, Suffolk, Sir Wilfrid Esdaile, Bart., to Amabel, only daughter of Claudius Ainslie, Esq., of The Chantry, near Bury, Suffolk.’ Amabel was married from Mrs. Thornton’s house in Prince’s Gardens, you know,” added Julia.

“Very nice indeed, very nice,” said Mr. Gilchrist, “only Ainslie might have hinted in it at his thirty years as a civil servant. ‘Late of Bombay’ would have been graceful, I think. However, that’s a matter of

taste. The matter of fact is that the best girl in the world has got a husband almost worthy of her. The second time he came out I felt sure it would be all right with Tom Esdaile's boy."

And Mr. Gilchrist walked off and smoked many congratulatory cheroots among the oleanders.

"John!" said Julia, after they had both been silent for some time, "do you think Laura will ever marry him? Do you think he will ever ask her?"

"I don't know. I don't think. Not for many a day, if ever."

"And then, suppose each of them should come to contrast the other with a vanished figure?"

"Not much fear of that, my dear. They would be very happy, I should say, admirably suited, and, as he is always to be lucky, she would be just a little too good for him."

"You are a little hard on Captain Dunstan, as I used to be. No, John, the only two persons absolutely matches in feeling

and in purpose whom I have ever known were Janet and Mr. Thornton. And they never even met."

"Of course they did not. What would you have? But Janet never would have been happy, for she must always have looked in human nature for what is not in it, and expected from the world what it has not to give."

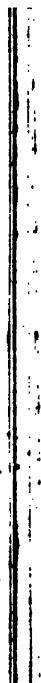
"We are very happy, John!" said Julia, with a little remonstrance in her tone.

"Very, my dear love; as happy as we can be. But life, as Janet dreamed of life, and love, as Janet would have had love, mean heaven, and heaven is not here."

THE END.

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